Guy Lehideux - Dominique Bar

Saint Benedict

- Messenger of Peace -

Éditions du Signe

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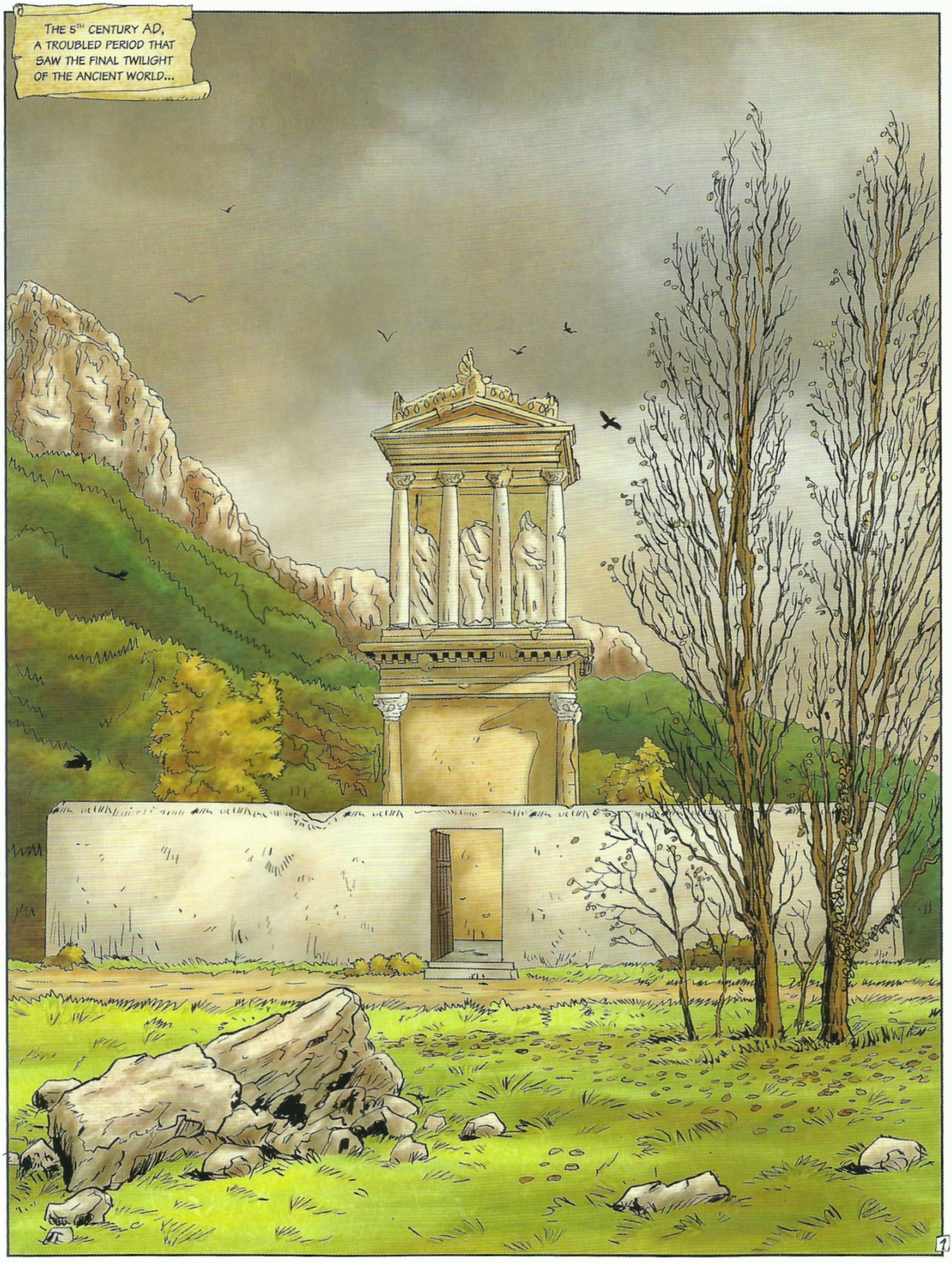
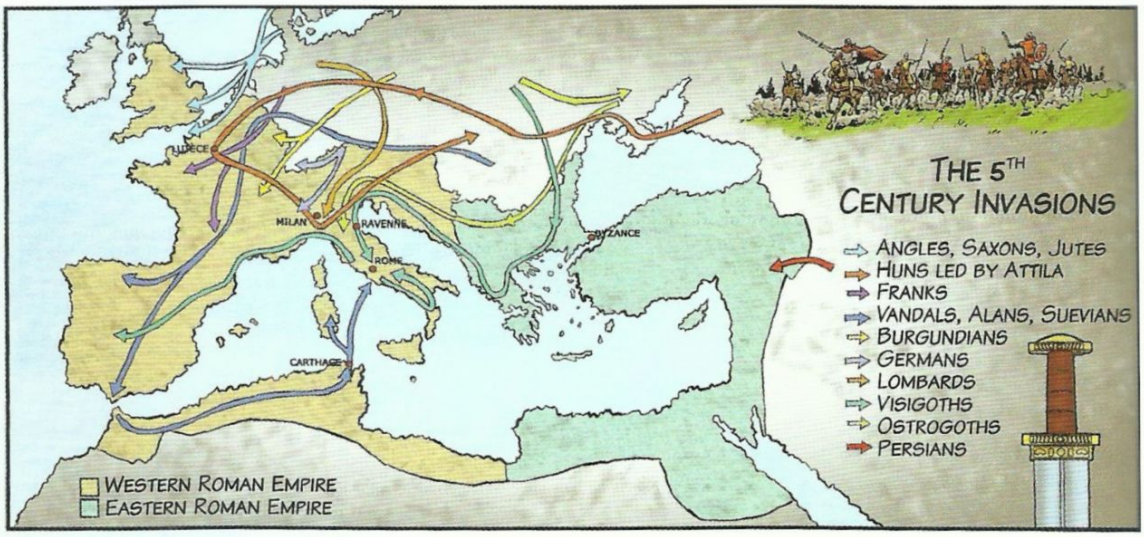
We would like to thank Fr René BORNERT, OSB,
for his expert advice and for his careful proofreading.


THE 5TH CENTURY AD, A TROUBLED PERIOD THAT SAW THE FINAL TWILIGHT OF THE ANCIENT WORLD...
1

A CENTURY MARKED BY THE END OF THE WESTERN ROMAN EMPIRE, RAVAGED BY THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS.

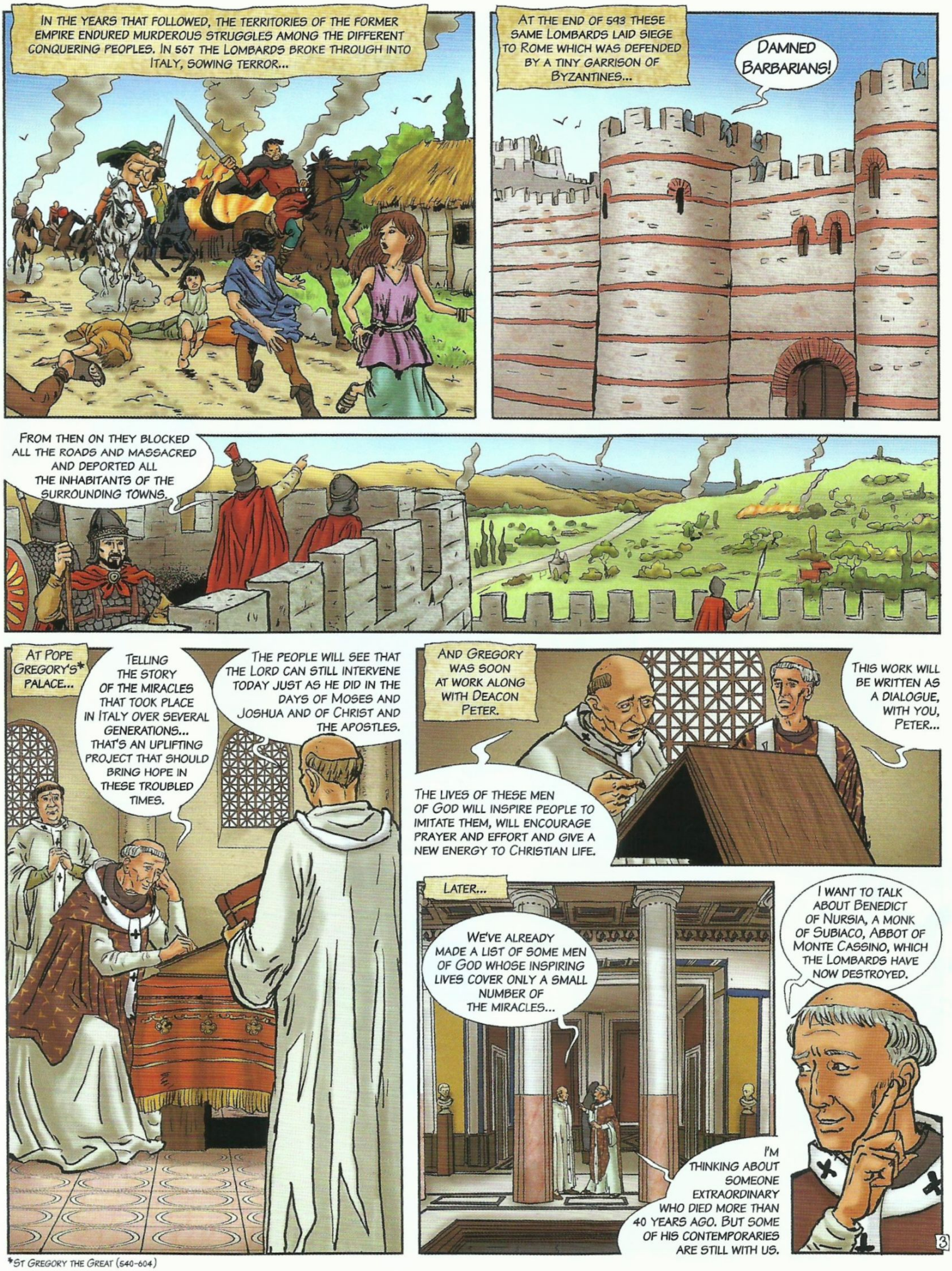
THE ROMAN EMPIRE, THAT GIANT WITH FEET OF CLAY, HAD BECOME UNGOVERNABLE AND WAS FINALLY DIVIDED IN TWO BY THE EMPEROR THEODOSIUS (379-395) FOR HIS TWO SONS. THE WESTERN EMPIRE FIRST HAD MILAN AS ITS CAPITAL AND THEN RAVENNA; ITS EMPEROR WAS HONORIUS. THE EASTERN EMPIRE, WITH BYZANTIUM AS ITS CAPITAL, WAS GOVERNED BY ARCADIUS. THE FRONTIERS WERE CREAKING, AND THE ROMAN ARMIES, ONCE INVINCIBLE, WERE UNABLE TO HOLD BACK THE FLOOD OF NEW CONQUERORS: VANDALS, ALANS, SUEVIANS, GERMANS, VISIGOTHS, BURGUNDIANS, AND THE PERSIANS AT THE FAR EASTERN CORNER...



SO ROME WAS SACKED IN 410 BY THE GOTHS OF KING ALARIC AND IN 455 BY THE VANDALS OF KING GENSERIC...

THESE TRAGIC EVENTS CAUSED ST JEROME TO SAY, "THE BRIGHTEST TORCH IN THE WORLD HAS GONE OUT. IN A SINGLE CITY THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE AND THE WHOLE OF CIVILISATION HAVE PERISHED".

IN 476 THE BARBARIAN CHIEF, ODOACER, DEPOSED ROMULUS AUGUSTULE, THE LAST WESTERN EMPEROR, WHO WAS 16 YEARS OLD...


In the years that followed, the territories of the former empire endured murderous struggles among the different conquering peoples. In 567 the Lombards broke through into Italy, sowing terror...
At the end of 593 these same Lombards laid siege to Rome which was defended by a tiny garrison of Byzantines...
Damned Barbarians!
From then on they blocked all the roads and massacred and deported all the inhabitants of the surrounding towns.
At Pope Gregory's* palace...
Telling the story of the miracles that took place in Italy over several generations... That's an uplifting project that should bring hope in these troubled times.
The people will see that the Lord can still intervene today just as he did in the days of Moses and Joshua and of Christ and the apostles.
And Gregory was soon at work along with Deacon Peter.
This work will be written as a dialogue, with you, Peter...
The lives of these men of God will inspire people to imitate them, will encourage prayer and effort and give a new energy to Christian life.
Later...
We've already made a list of some men of God whose inspiring lives cover only a small number of the miracles...
I'm thinking about someone extraordinary who died more than 40 years ago. But some of his contemporaries are still with us.
I want to talk about Benedict of Nursia, a monk of Subiaco, Abbot of Monte Cassino, which the Lombards have now destroyed.
3

*St Gregory the Great (540-604)

THE INQUIRY SOON BEGAN. THE FINAL LIVING WITNESSES WERE FOUND AND THEIR MEMORIES WERE WRITTEN DOWN.

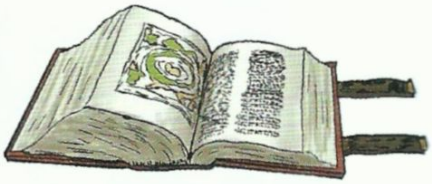
THE WITNESSES WERE CONSTANTINE AND SIMPLICIUS, SUCCESSORS OF BENEDICT AT MONTE CASSINO, AS WELL AS VALENTINE, HONORIUS AND SEVERAL OTHERS...

AND SOON...

WHAT A MODEL OF HOLINESS! AND HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS WONDERFUL MONASTIC RULE!

I WANT TO PRESENT BENEDICT AS SOMEONE ON A PAR WITH THE GREAT MEN OF THE BIBLE.

AND SO POPE GREGORY PLANNED A COMPLETE BOOK* WITH 38 CHAPTERS ABOUT BENEDICT OF NURSIA, AS PART OF HIS FOUR WORKS OF "DIALOGUES" WITH DEACON PETER.



SOMETIME BETWEEN 480 AND 490 BENEDICT WAS BORN TO A COMFORTABLE CHRISTIAN FAMILY OF NURSIA** IN THE APENNINE MOUNTAINS, IN UMBRIA, ABOUT 60 MILES NORTH-EAST OF ROME.

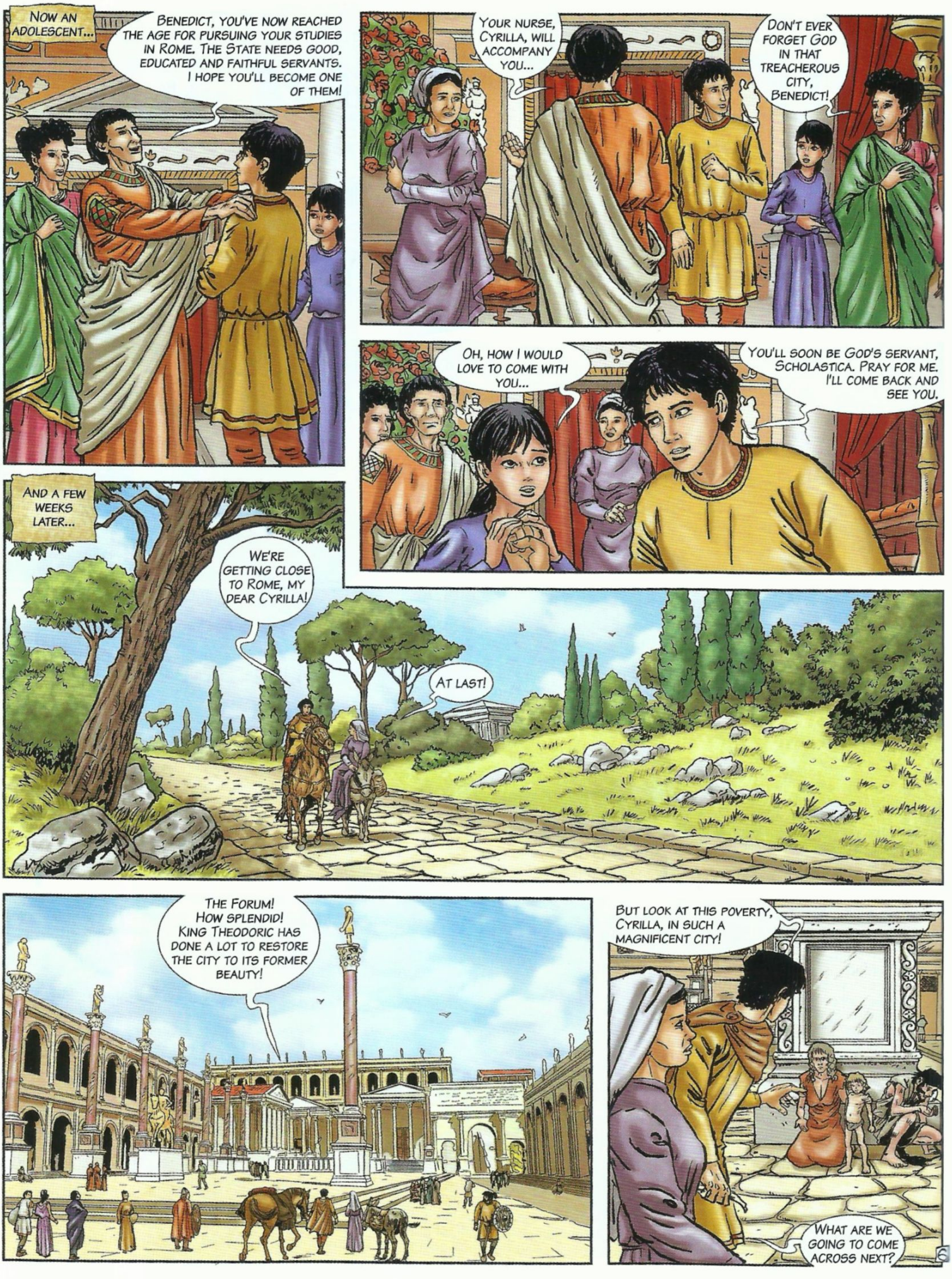
IT'S A BOY! THE MASTER'S ALREADY NAMED HIM "BENEDICTUS"*** BECAUSE HE'S BLESSED BY GOD.

YES, AND TO MARK THE EVENT THERE WILL BE A BANQUET AND ALL THE POOR PEOPLE FROM THE VILLAGE WILL BE INVITED.

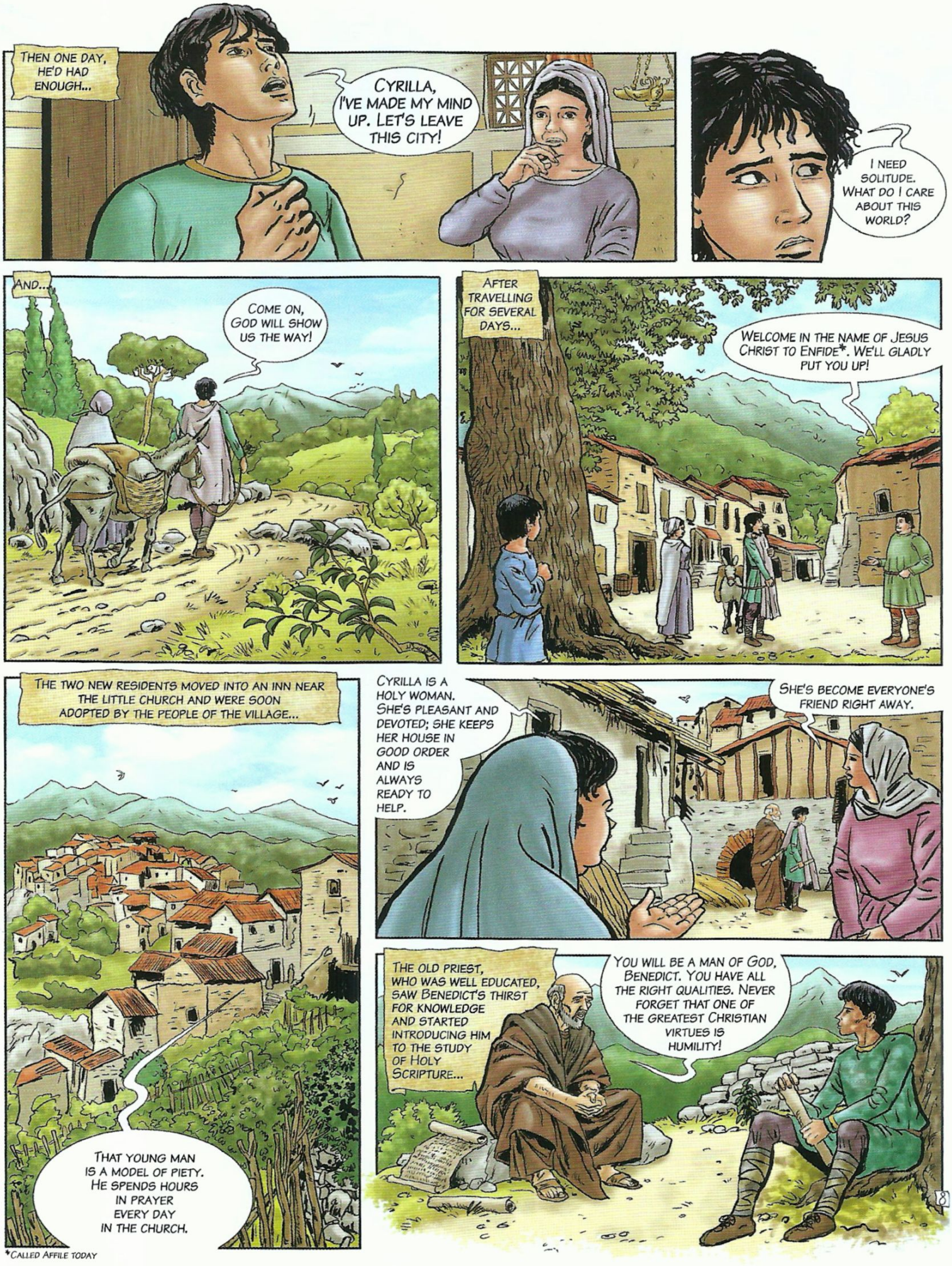
*THE SECOND **NOW CALLED NORCIA ***"BENEDICT" IN ENGLISH

At the time of Benedict's birth there were six "Barbarian" royal regimes controlling western Europe. Odoacer ruled over Italy.
At this time Clovis, King of the Franks, undertook to conquer Gaul.
As was the custom in those days, Benedict was entrusted to a wet-nurse called Cyrilla, who would always care for him.
Scholastica, a little girl, was born to the family next.
Your father has decided to dedicate your little sister to God. You'll soon be learning to read ... and write.
Dominus, domine, dominum, domini, domino, domino...
A grammar teacher was soon on the scene to start young Benedict's education in literature.
While Benedict and Scholastica were children, Italy fell into the hands of the Ostrogoths. The new king, Theodoric*, who reigned from 493 to 526, soon surrounded himself with Roman officials...
A bad Roman imitates the Goths...
A good Goth imitates the Romans...
May true harmony reign between our two peoples!
An era of peace and prosperity began for Italy.
5

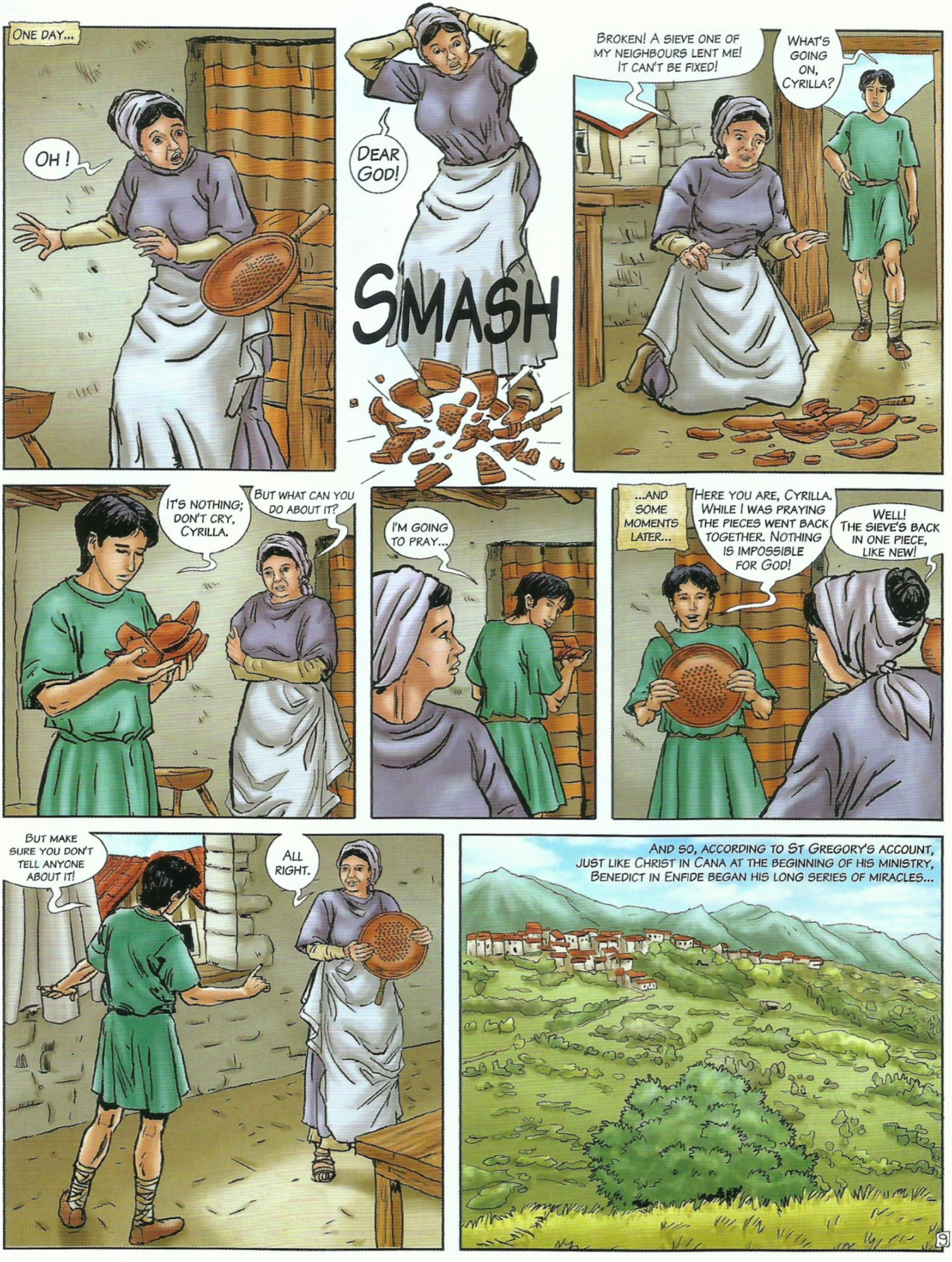
*464-526

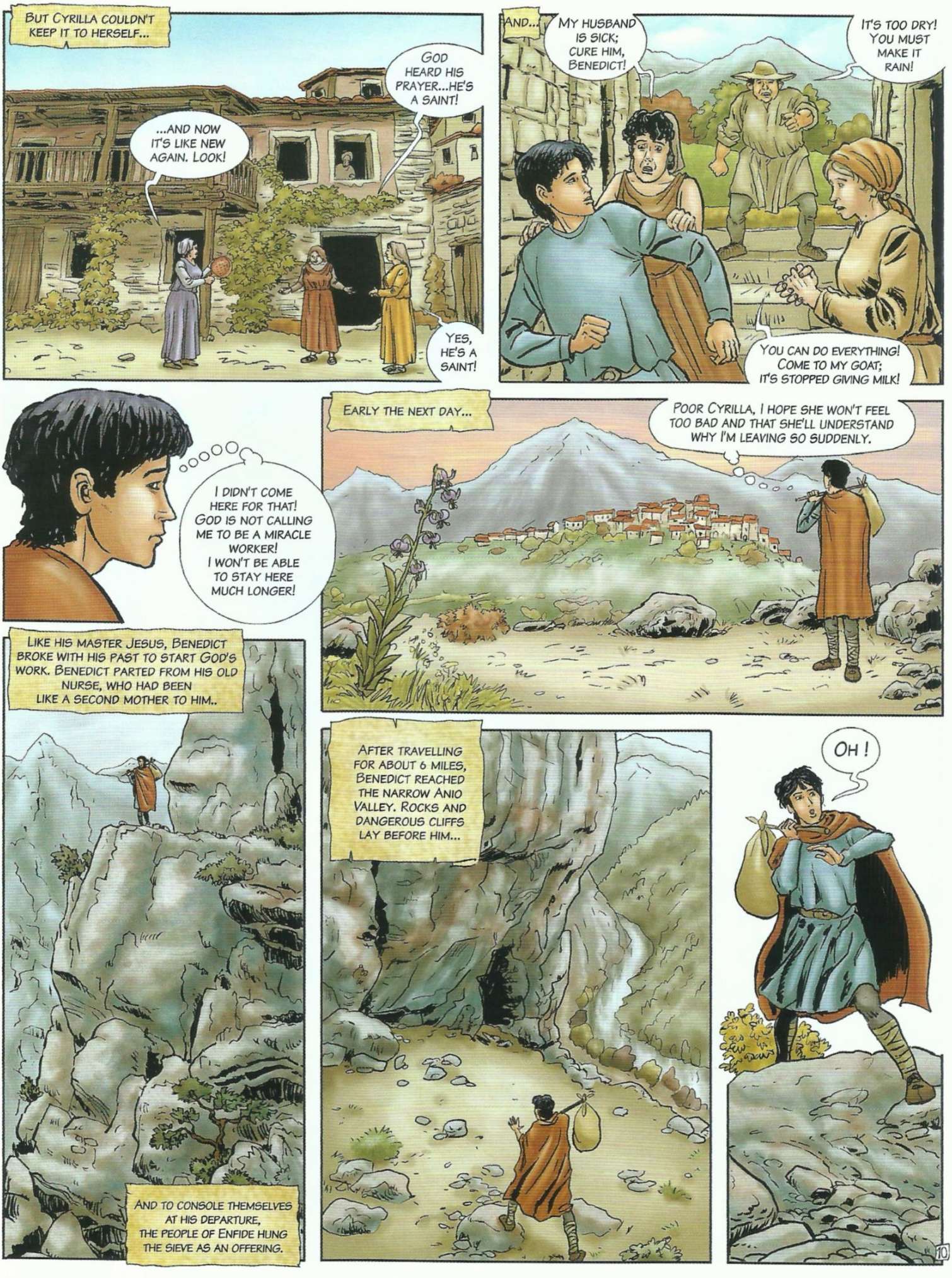

NOW AN ADOLESCENT...
BENEDICT, YOU'VE NOW REACHED THE AGE FOR PURSUING YOUR STUDIES IN ROME. THE STATE NEEDS GOOD, EDUCATED AND FAITHFUL SERVANTS. I HOPE YOU'LL BECOME ONE OF THEM!
YOUR NURSE, CYRILLA, WILL ACCOMPANY YOU...
DON'T EVER FORGET GOD IN THAT TREACHEROUS CITY, BENEDICT!
OH, HOW I WOULD LOVE TO COME WITH YOU...
YOU'LL SOON BE GOD'S SERVANT, SCHOLASTICA. PRAY FOR ME. I'LL COME BACK AND SEE YOU.
AND A FEW WEEKS LATER...
WE'RE GETTING CLOSE TO ROME, MY DEAR CYRILLA!
AT LAST!
THE FORUM! HOW SPLENDID! KING THEODORIC HAS DONE A LOT TO RESTORE THE CITY TO ITS FORMER BEAUTY!
BUT LOOK AT THIS POVERTY, CYRILLA, IN SUCH A MAGNIFICENT CITY!
WHAT ARE WE GOING TO COME ACROSS NEXT?

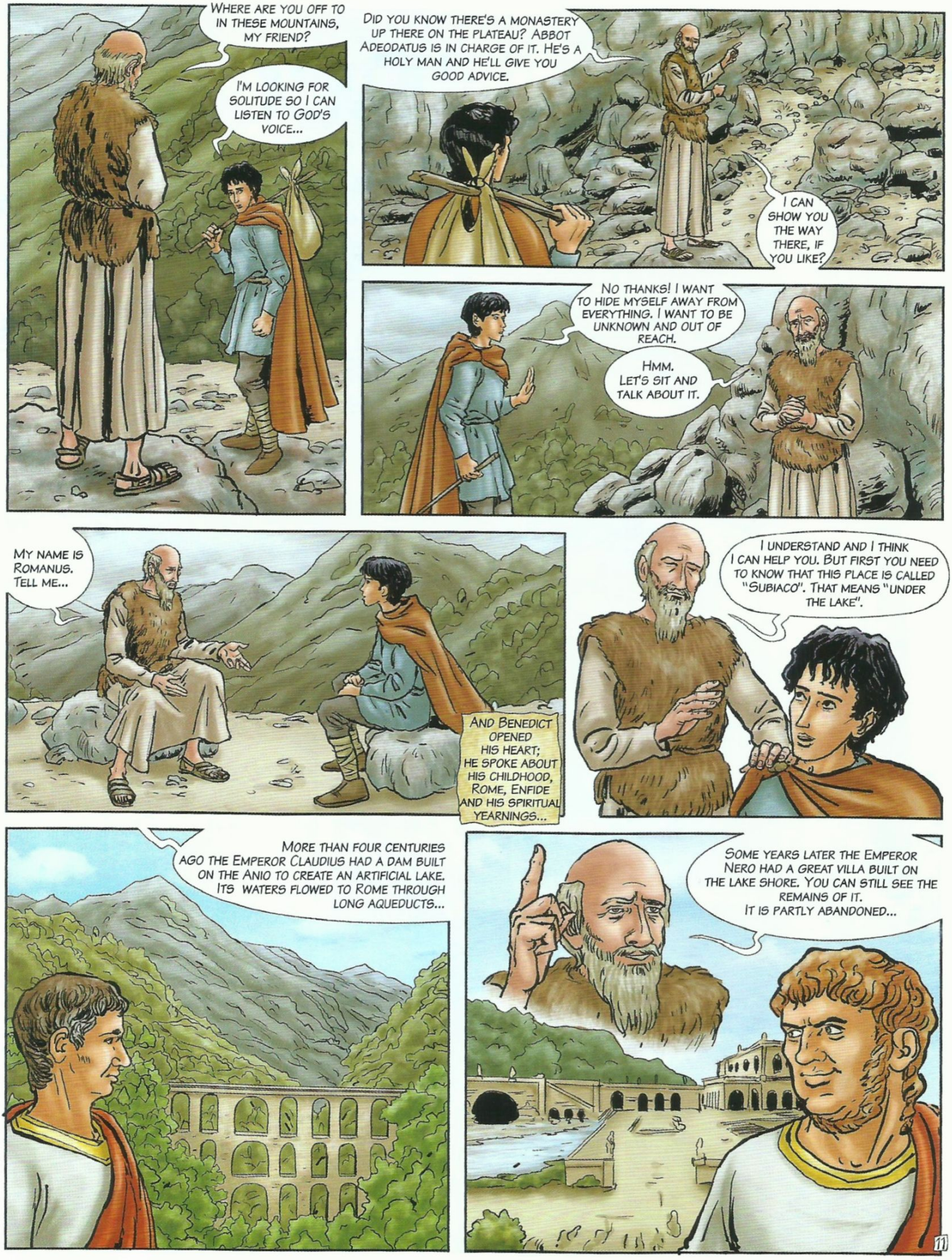
EARLY ON, BENEDICT BEGAN TO FEEL UNEASY...
WHAT I'VE HEARD AGAIN TODAY IS NOT VERY SPIRITUAL. I DON'T REALLY LIKE THESE RHETORIC CLASSES...
...AND COME AND ENJOY YOURSELF A BIT WITH US!
THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF WINE AND YOUNG GIRLS HERE!
LEAVE YOUR WRITING TABLETS, BENEDICT...
IGNORE HIM! THAT COUNTRY-BUMPKIN DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO ENJOY THE PLEASURES OF THIS WORLD!
HE'LL LEARN SOMEDAY THAT LIFE IS SHORT, VERY SHORT, AND YOU HAVE TO KNOW HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF IT.
AND OFTEN IN THE EVENING...
DEAR CYRILLA, I'M TRYING TO KEEP UP WITH MY STUDIES AND WORK HARD, AS I PROMISED MY FATHER, BUT I'M OVERWHELMED...
MOST OF OUR PROFESSORS ARE PAGANS, AND ALL MY FRIENDS THINK ABOUT IS HAVING A GOOD TIME AND VISITING CLUBS.
BE STRONG, BENEDICT. THE LORD WILL NOT ABANDON YOU!
PLEASE, LORD, HELP ME TO RESIST THE TEMPTATIONS OF THIS CITY WHERE CHRISTIANS OFTEN BEHAVE LIKE PAGANS!
7


THEN ONE DAY, HE'D HAD ENOUGH...
CYRILLA, I'VE MADE MY MIND UP. LET'S LEAVE THIS CITY!
I NEED SOLITUDE. WHAT DO I CARE ABOUT THIS WORLD?
AND...
COME ON, GOD WILL SHOW US THE WAY!
AFTER TRAVELLING FOR SEVERAL DAYS...
WELCOME IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST TO ENFIDE*. WE'LL GLADLY PUT YOU UP!
THE TWO NEW RESIDENTS MOVED INTO AN INN NEAR THE LITTLE CHURCH AND WERE SOON ADOPTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE VILLAGE...
CYRILLA IS A HOLY WOMAN. SHE'S PLEASANT AND DEVOTED; SHE KEEPS HER HOUSE IN GOOD ORDER AND IS ALWAYS READY TO HELP.
SHE'S BECOME EVERYONE'S FRIEND RIGHT AWAY.
THAT YOUNG MAN IS A MODEL OF PIETY. HE SPENDS HOURS IN PRAYER EVERY DAY IN THE CHURCH.
THE OLD PRIEST, WHO WAS WELL EDUCATED, SAW BENEDICT'S THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE AND STARTED INTRODUCING HIM TO THE STUDY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE...
YOU WILL BE A MAN OF GOD, BENEDICT. YOU HAVE ALL THE RIGHT QUALITIES. NEVER FORGET THAT ONE OF THE GREATEST CHRISTIAN VIRTUES IS HUMILITY!
8

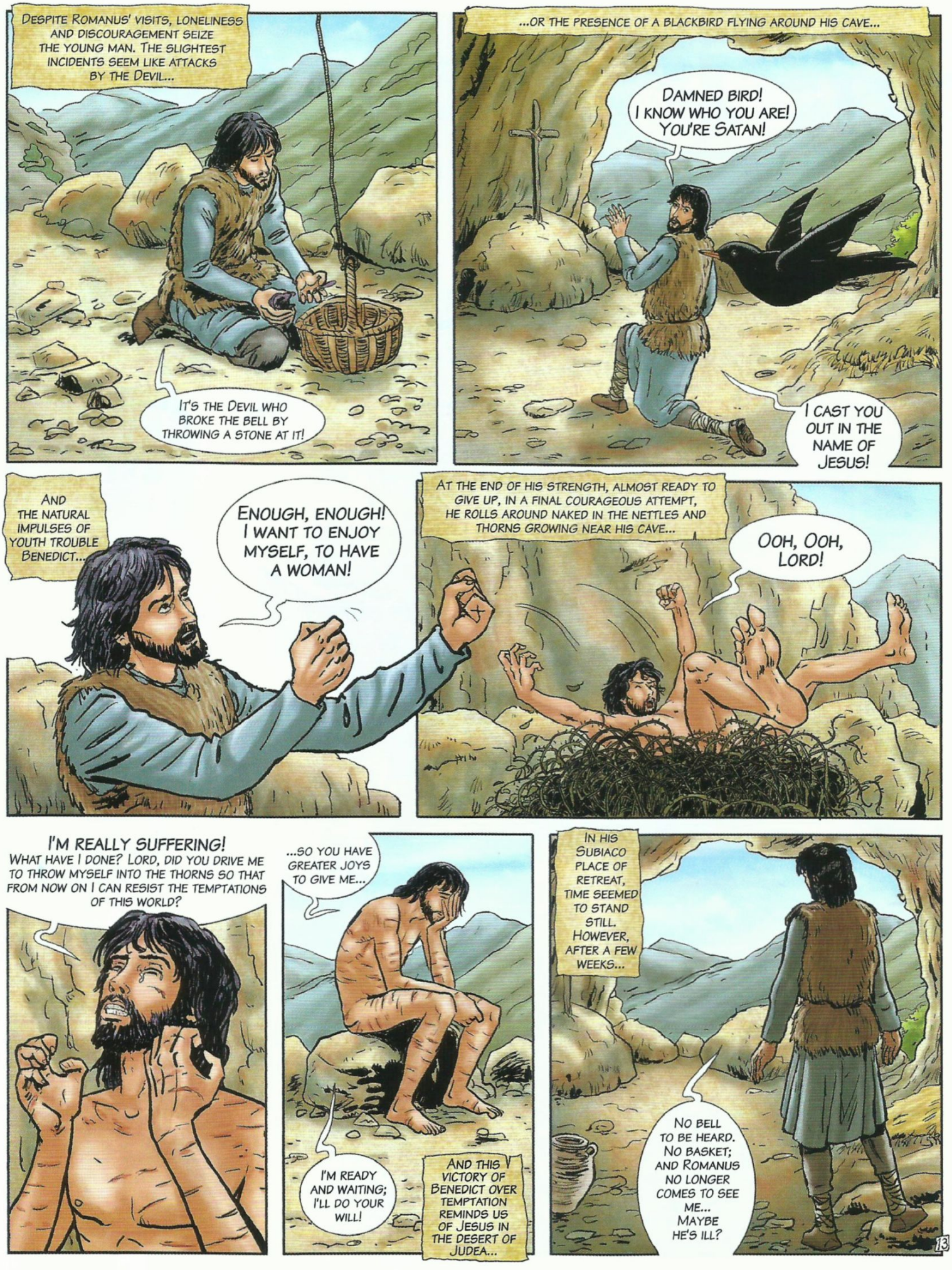
*CALLED AFFILE TODAY


ONE DAY...
OH!
DEAR GOD!
SMASH
BROKEN! A SIEVE ONE OF MY NEIGHBOURS LENT ME! IT CAN'T BE FIXED!
WHAT'S GOING ON, CYRILLA?
IT'S NOTHING; DON'T CRY, CYRILLA.
BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?
I'M GOING TO PRAY...
...AND SOME MOMENTS LATER...
HERE YOU ARE, CYRILLA. WHILE I WAS PRAYING THE PIECES WENT BACK TOGETHER. NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD!
WELL! THE SIEVE'S BACK IN ONE PIECE, LIKE NEW!
BUT MAKE SURE YOU DON'T TELL ANYONE ABOUT IT!
ALL RIGHT.
AND SO, ACCORDING TO ST GREGORY'S ACCOUNT, JUST LIKE CHRIST IN CANA AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS MINISTRY, BENEDICT IN ENFIDE BEGAN HIS LONG SERIES OF MIRACLES...

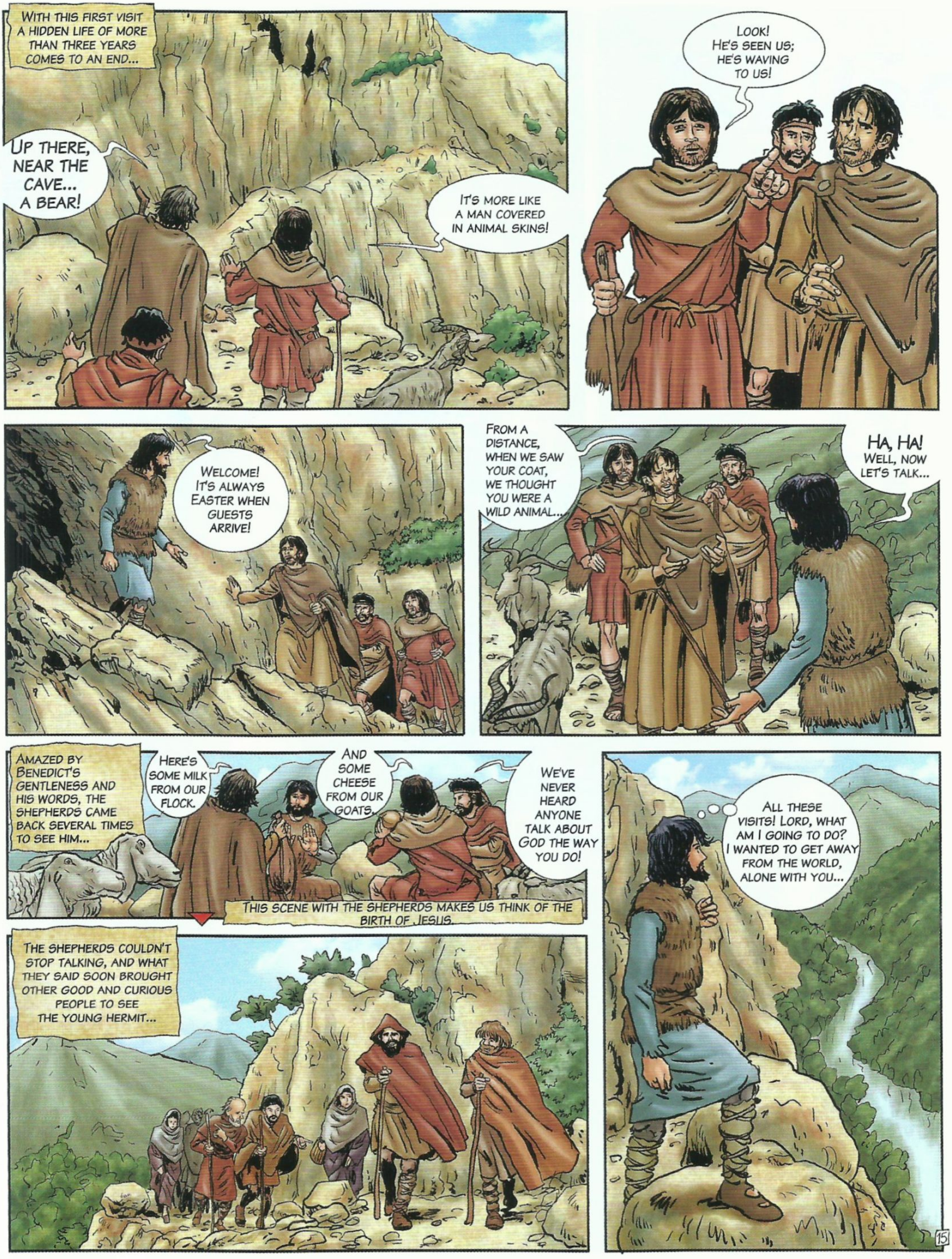

But Cyrilla couldn't keep it to herself...
God heard his prayer...he's a saint!
...and now it's like new again. Look!
Yes, he's a saint!
And...
My husband is sick; cure him, Benedict!
It's too dry! You must make it rain!
You can do everything! Come to my goat; it's stopped giving milk!
I didn't come here for that! God is not calling me to be a miracle worker! I won't be able to stay here much longer!
Early the next day...
Poor Cyrilla, I hope she won't feel too bad and that she'll understand why I'm leaving so suddenly.
Like his master Jesus, Benedict broke with his past to start God's work. Benedict parted from his old nurse, who had been like a second mother to him..
And to console themselves at his departure, the people of Enfide hung the sieve as an offering.
After travelling for about 6 miles, Benedict reached the narrow Anio Valley. Rocks and dangerous cliffs lay before him...
Oh!
10

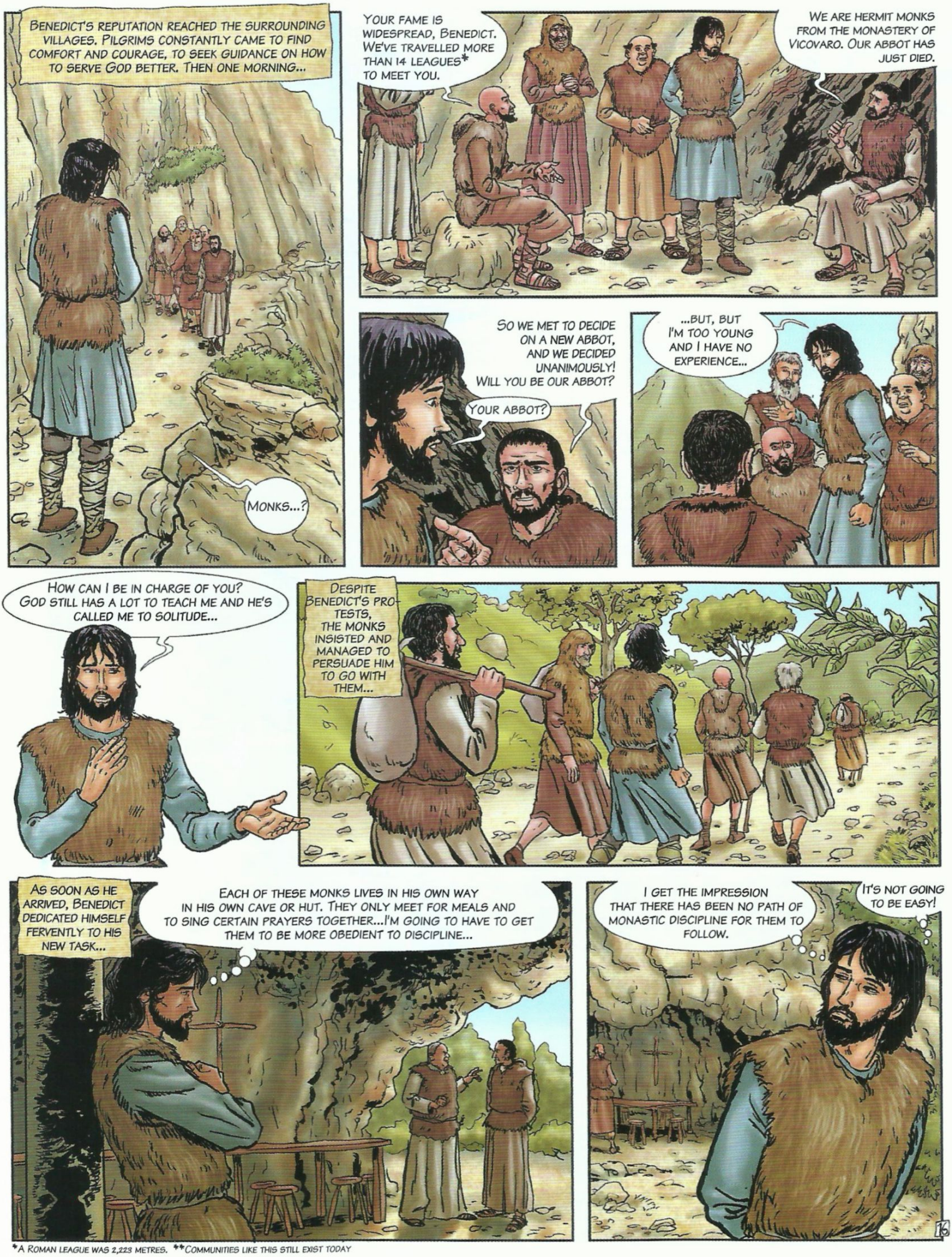

WHERE ARE YOU OFF TO IN THESE MOUNTAINS, MY FRIEND?
I'M LOOKING FOR SOLITUDE SO I CAN LISTEN TO GOD'S VOICE...
DID YOU KNOW THERE'S A MONASTERY UP THERE ON THE PLATEAU? ABBOT ADEODATUS IS IN CHARGE OF IT. HE'S A HOLY MAN AND HE'LL GIVE YOU GOOD ADVICE.
I CAN SHOW YOU THE WAY THERE, IF YOU LIKE?
NO THANKS! I WANT TO HIDE MYSELF AWAY FROM EVERYTHING. I WANT TO BE UNKNOWN AND OUT OF REACH.
HMM. LET'S SIT AND TALK ABOUT IT.
MY NAME IS ROMANUS. TELL ME...
AND BENEDICT OPENED HIS HEART; HE SPOKE ABOUT HIS CHILDHOOD, ROME, ENFIDE AND HIS SPIRITUAL YEARNINGS...
I UNDERSTAND AND I THINK I CAN HELP YOU. BUT FIRST YOU NEED TO KNOW THAT THIS PLACE IS CALLED "SUBIACO". THAT MEANS "UNDER THE LAKE".
MORE THAN FOUR CENTURIES AGO THE EMPEROR CLAUDIUS HAD A DAM BUILT ON THE ANIO TO CREATE AN ARTIFICIAL LAKE. ITS WATERS FLOWED TO ROME THROUGH LONG AQUEDUCTS...
SOME YEARS LATER THE EMPEROR NERO HAD A GREAT VILLA BUILT ON THE LAKE SHORE. YOU CAN STILL SEE THE REMAINS OF IT. IT IS PARTLY ABANDONED...
11

AND AFTER SOME MORE EXPLANATION...
THERE'S A CAVE THAT WILL BE JUST WHAT YOU NEED!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT FOOD. I'LL PROVIDE IT FOR YOU. BUT I'M TOO OLD TO GET DOWN FROM MY HERMITAGE AS OFTEN AS I'D LIKE TO.
EACH WEEK I'LL SEND SOME SUPPLIES DOWN TO YOU IN A BASKET ATTACHED TO A ROPE. I'LL RING A LITTLE BELL TO LET YOU KNOW THAT THE FOOD IS ON ITS WAY.
ALONE IN HIS CAVE, BENEDICT PRAYS. TIME PASSES...
I THANK YOU, LORD, FOR JUST AS YOU NOURISHED THE HEBREW PEOPLE IN THE DESERT AND THE PROPHET ELIJAH BY MEANS OF CROWS...
...SO YOU HAVE GIVEN ME MY FILL THROUGH YOUR SERVANT ROMANUS...
GOOD AND FAITHFUL BROTHER ROMANUS; HE SHARES THE LITTLE HE HAS WITH ME LIKE THIS...
DING, DING!
DING, DING!
DING, DING!
EVERY NOW AND THEN ROMANUS CAME DOWN TO PRAY WITH HIM AND ENCOURAGE HIM...
YOU ARE A REAL MAN OF GOD, BENEDICT. YOU ARE NOW WORTHY TO WEAR A MONK'S CLOTHING!
12

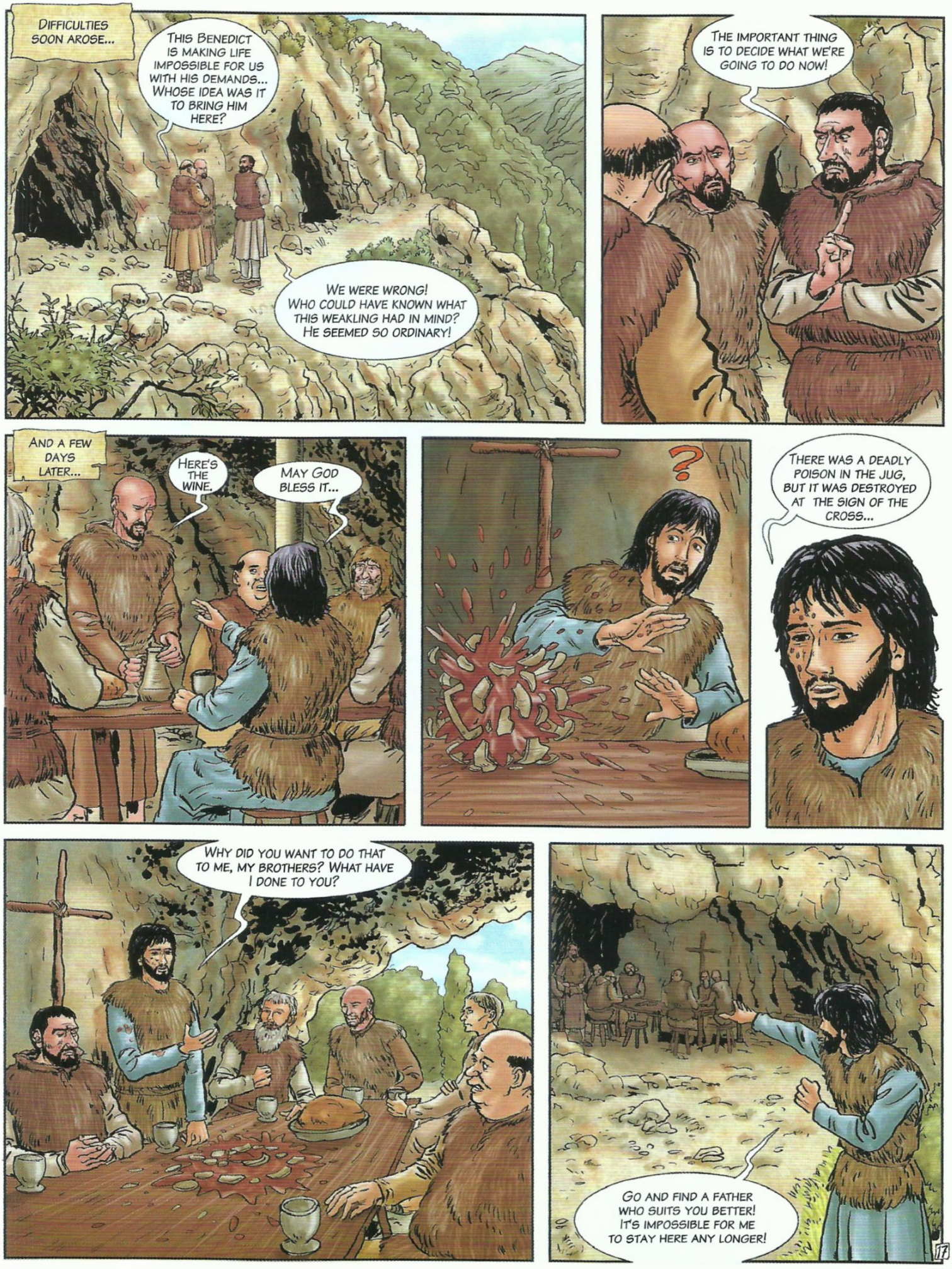

Despite Romanus' visits, loneliness and discouragement seize the young man. The slightest incidents seem like attacks by the Devil...
It's the Devil who broke the bell by throwing a stone at it!
...or the presence of a blackbird flying around his cave...
Damned bird! I know who you are! You're Satan!
I cast you out in the name of Jesus!
And the natural impulses of youth trouble Benedict...
Enough, enough! I want to enjoy myself, to have a woman!
At the end of his strength, almost ready to give up, in a final courageous attempt, he rolls around naked in the nettles and thorns growing near his cave...
Ooh, Ooh, Lord!
I'm really suffering!
What have I done? Lord, did you drive me to throw myself into the thorns so that from now on I can resist the temptations of this world?
...so you have greater joys to give me...
I'm ready and waiting; I'll do your will!
And this victory of Benedict over temptation reminds us of Jesus in the desert of Judea...
In his Subiaco place of retreat, time seemed to stand still. However, after a few weeks...
No bell to be heard. No basket; and Romanus no longer comes to see me... Maybe he's ill?
13

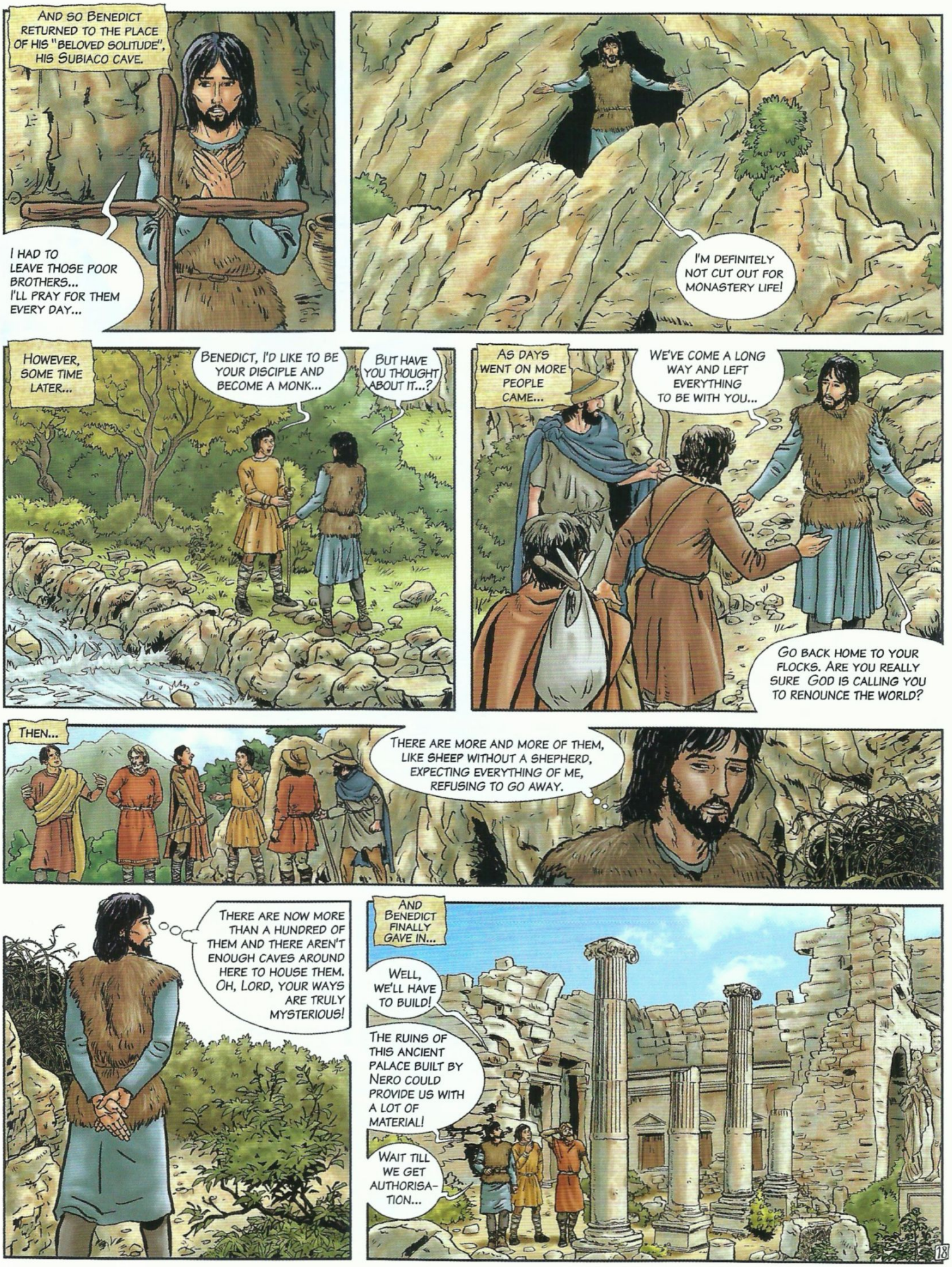
AND...
I'LL LIVE OFF ROOTS AND WILD BERRIES FROM NOW ON, LORD. I KNOW YOU'LL NEVER ABANDON ME.
THEN ONE DAY...!
AT LAST I'VE FOUND YOU, MY BROTHER! GET UP; IT'S A FEAST TODAY!
TODAY IT'S THE FEAST OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION. STOP YOUR FASTING AND LOOK AT WHAT I'VE BROUGHT YOU!
EASTER?
YES, YES! I KNOW IT REALLY IS EASTER BECAUSE I HAVE THE HONOUR OF SEEING YOU!
THIS MORNING SOME GENEROUS PEOPLE BROUGHT ME LOTS OF FOOD SO THAT I COULD HAVE A GOOD MEAL ON THIS BLESSED DAY. WHILE I WAS LISTENING TO THEM I DISTINCTLY HEARD A VOICE TELLING ME:
YOU'RE ABOUT TO PREPARE SOME DELICIOUS DISHES WHILE MY SERVANT BENEDICT IS SUFFERING FROM HUNGER IN THE CAVE AT SUBIACO
?
SO I LEFT RIGHT AWAY TO LOOK FOR YOU AMONG THE STEEP PEAKS AND VALLEYS...AND I'VE FOUND YOU!
THE ALMIGHTY SHOWED YOU WHERE MY HIDING PLACE IS. MAY HE BE BLESSED FOR EVER!
AND LATER...
GO IN PEACE, MY BROTHER. I'LL PRAY FOR YOU!
GOODBYE, BENEDICT! I'LL NEVER FORGET MEETING YOU...
THIS MEAL SHARED ON EASTER SUNDAY REMINDS US OF THE MEAL THAT THE RISEN JESUS SHARED WITH HIS DISCIPLES ON EASTER EVENING...

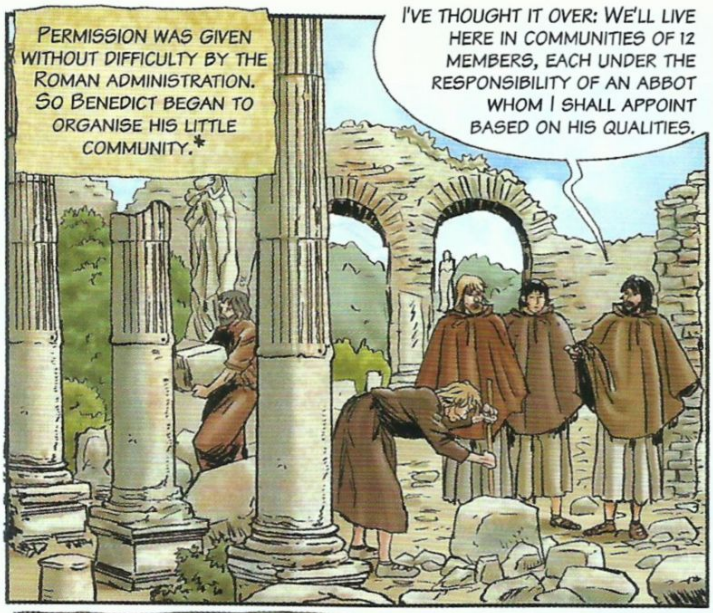

WITH THIS FIRST VISIT A HIDDEN LIFE OF MORE THAN THREE YEARS COMES TO AN END...
UP THERE, NEAR THE CAVE... A BEAR!
IT'S MORE LIKE A MAN COVERED IN ANIMAL SKINS!
LOOK! HE'S SEEN US; HE'S WAVING TO US!
WELCOME! IT'S ALWAYS EASTER WHEN GUESTS ARRIVE!
FROM A DISTANCE, WHEN WE SAW YOUR COAT, WE THOUGHT YOU WERE A WILD ANIMAL...
HA, HA! WELL, NOW LET'S TALK...
AMAZED BY BENEDICT'S GENTLENESS AND HIS WORDS, THE SHEPHERDS CAME BACK SEVERAL TIMES TO SEE HIM...
HERE'S SOME MILK FROM OUR FLOCK.
AND SOME CHEESE FROM OUR GOATS.
WE'VE NEVER HEARD ANYONE TALK ABOUT GOD THE WAY YOU DO!
THIS SCENE WITH THE SHEPHERDS MAKES US THINK OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS.
ALL THESE VISITS! LORD, WHAT AM I GOING TO DO? I WANTED TO GET AWAY FROM THE WORLD, ALONE WITH YOU...
THE SHEPHERDS COULDN'T STOP TALKING, AND WHAT THEY SAID SOON BROUGHT OTHER GOOD AND CURIOUS PEOPLE TO SEE THE YOUNG HERMIT...
15

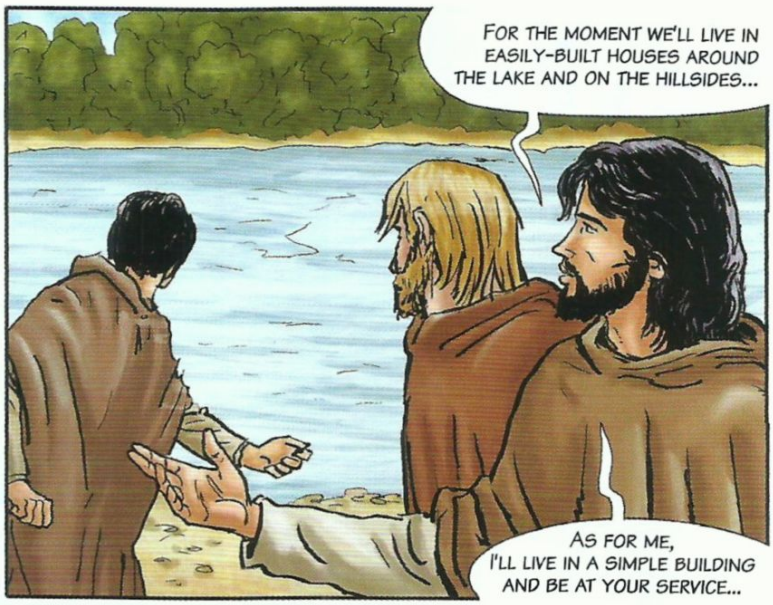

BENEDICT'S REPUTATION REACHED THE SURROUNDING VILLAGES. PILGRIMS CONSTANTLY CAME TO FIND COMFORT AND COURAGE, TO SEEK GUIDANCE ON HOW TO SERVE GOD BETTER. THEN ONE MORNING...
MONKS...?
YOUR FAME IS WIDESPREAD, BENEDICT. WE'VE TRAVELLED MORE THAN 14 LEAGUES* TO MEET YOU.
WE ARE HERMIT MONKS FROM THE MONASTERY OF VICOVARO. OUR ABBOT HAS JUST DIED.
SO WE MET TO DECIDE ON A NEW ABBOT, AND WE DECIDED UNANIMOUSLY! WILL YOU BE OUR ABBOT?
YOUR ABBOT?
...BUT, BUT I'M TOO YOUNG AND I HAVE NO EXPERIENCE...
HOW CAN I BE IN CHARGE OF YOU? GOD STILL HAS A LOT TO TEACH ME AND HE'S CALLED ME TO SOLITUDE...
DESPITE BENEDICT'S PROTESTS, THE MONKS INSISTED AND MANAGED TO PERSUADE HIM TO GO WITH THEM...
AS SOON AS HE ARRIVED, BENEDICT DEDICATED HIMSELF FERVENTLY TO HIS NEW TASK...
EACH OF THESE MONKS LIVES IN HIS OWN WAY IN HIS OWN CAVE OR HUT. THEY ONLY MEET FOR MEALS AND TO SING CERTAIN PRAYERS TOGETHER...I'M GOING TO HAVE TO GET THEM TO BE MORE OBEDIENT TO DISCIPLINE...
I GET THE IMPRESSION THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO PATH OF MONASTIC DISCIPLINE FOR THEM TO FOLLOW.
IT'S NOT GOING TO BE EASY!

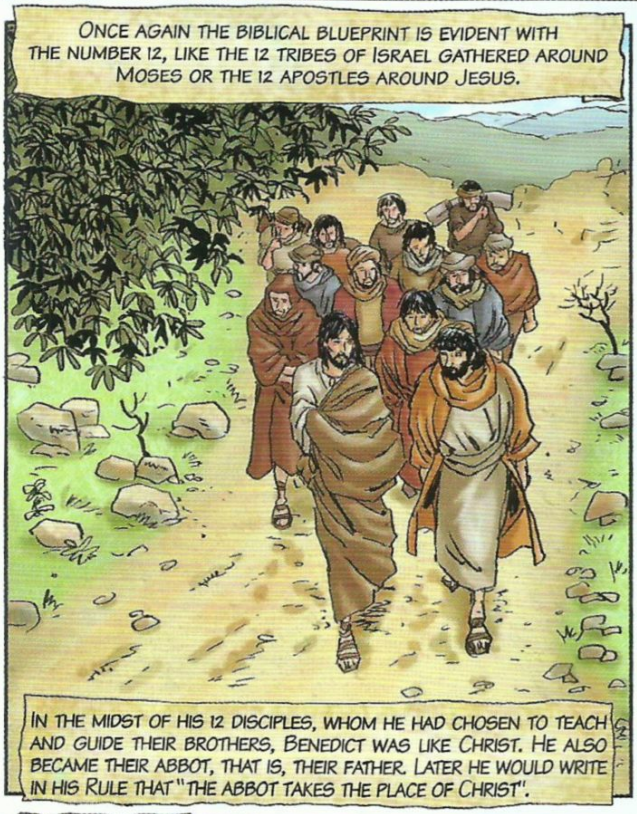
*A ROMAN LEAGUE WAS 2,223 METRES. **COMMUNITIES LIKE THIS STILL EXIST TODAY

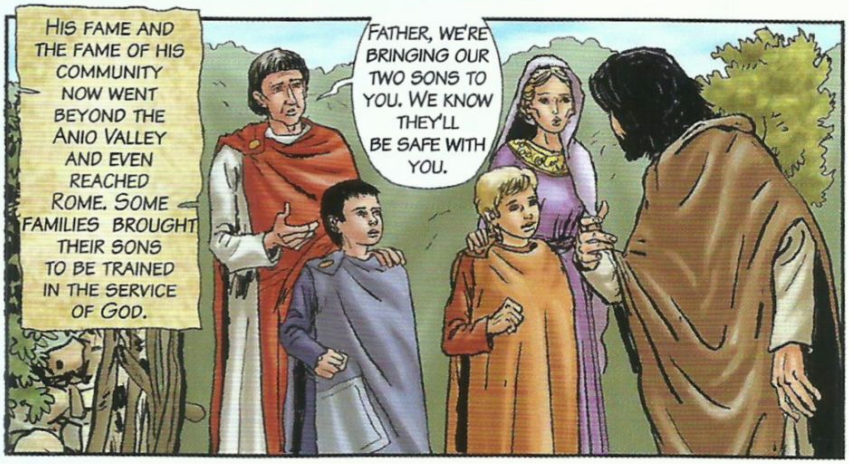

DIFFICULTIES SOON AROSE...
THIS BENEDICT IS MAKING LIFE IMPOSSIBLE FOR US WITH HIS DEMANDS... WHOSE IDEA WAS IT TO BRING HIM HERE?
WE WERE WRONG! WHO COULD HAVE KNOWN WHAT THIS WEAKLING HAD IN MIND? HE SEEMED SO ORDINARY!
THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO DECIDE WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO NOW!
AND A FEW DAYS LATER...
HERE'S THE WINE.
MAY GOD BLESS IT...
?
THERE WAS A DEADLY POISON IN THE JUG, BUT IT WAS DESTROYED AT THE SIGN OF THE CROSS...
WHY DID YOU WANT TO DO THAT TO ME, MY BROTHERS? WHAT HAVE I DONE TO YOU?
GO AND FIND A FATHER WHO SUITS YOU BETTER! IT'S IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO STAY HERE ANY LONGER!
17


And so Benedict returned to the place of his "beloved solitude", his Subiaco cave.
I had to leave those poor brothers... I'll pray for them every day...
I'm definitely not cut out for monastery life!
However, some time later...
Benedict, I'd like to be your disciple and become a monk...
But have you thought about it...?
As days went on more people came...
We've come a long way and left everything to be with you...
Go back home to your flocks. Are you really sure God is calling you to renounce the world?
Then...
There are more and more of them, like sheep without a shepherd, expecting everything of me, refusing to go away.
There are now more than a hundred of them and there aren't enough caves around here to house them. Oh, Lord, your ways are truly mysterious!
And Benedict finally gave in...
Well, we'll have to build!
The ruins of this ancient palace built by Nero could provide us with a lot of material!
Wait till we get authorisation...
18

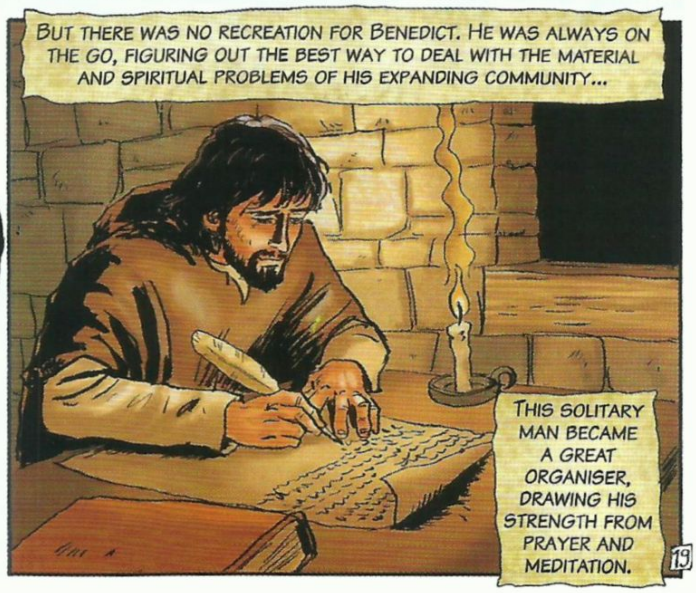

PERMISSION WAS GIVEN WITHOUT DIFFICULTY BY THE ROMAN ADMINISTRATION. SO BENEDICT BEGAN TO ORGANISE HIS LITTLE COMMUNITY.*
I'VE THOUGHT IT OVER: WE'LL LIVE HERE IN COMMUNITIES OF 12 MEMBERS, EACH UNDER THE RESPONSIBILITY OF AN ABBOT WHOM I SHALL APPOINT BASED ON HIS QUALITIES.


FOR THE MOMENT WE'LL LIVE IN EASILY-BUILT HOUSES AROUND THE LAKE AND ON THE HILLSIDES...
AS FOR ME, I'LL LIVE IN A SIMPLE BUILDING AND BE AT YOUR SERVICE...


ONCE AGAIN THE BIBLICAL BLUEPRINT IS EVIDENT WITH THE NUMBER 12, LIKE THE 12 TRIBES OF ISRAEL GATHERED AROUND MOSES OR THE 12 APOSTLES AROUND JESUS.
IN THE MIDST OF HIS 12 DISCIPLES, WHOM HE HAD CHOSEN TO TEACH AND GUIDE THEIR BROTHERS, BENEDICT WAS LIKE CHRIST. HE ALSO BECAME THEIR ABBOT, THAT IS, THEIR FATHER. LATER HE WOULD WRITE IN HIS RULE THAT "THE ABBOT TAKES THE PLACE OF CHRIST".


HIS FAME AND THE FAME OF HIS COMMUNITY NOW WENT BEYOND THE ANIO VALLEY AND EVEN REACHED ROME. SOME FAMILIES BROUGHT THEIR SONS TO BE TRAINED IN THE SERVICE OF GOD.
FATHER, WE'RE BRINGING OUR TWO SONS TO YOU. WE KNOW THEY'LL BE SAFE WITH YOU.

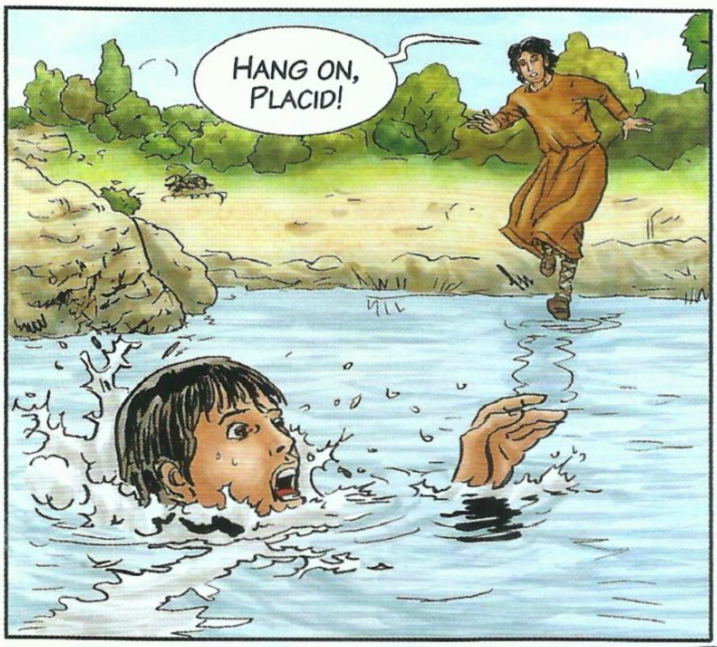
CHILDREN FROM ALL SOCIAL CLASSES WERE ACCEPTED FREE OF CHARGE, PROVIDED THEY WANTED TO SERVE GOD ONE DAY...
YOU'LL SOON LIVE HERE**...YOUR DAY WILL BE DIVIDED INTO PRAYER, WORK AND STUDY.

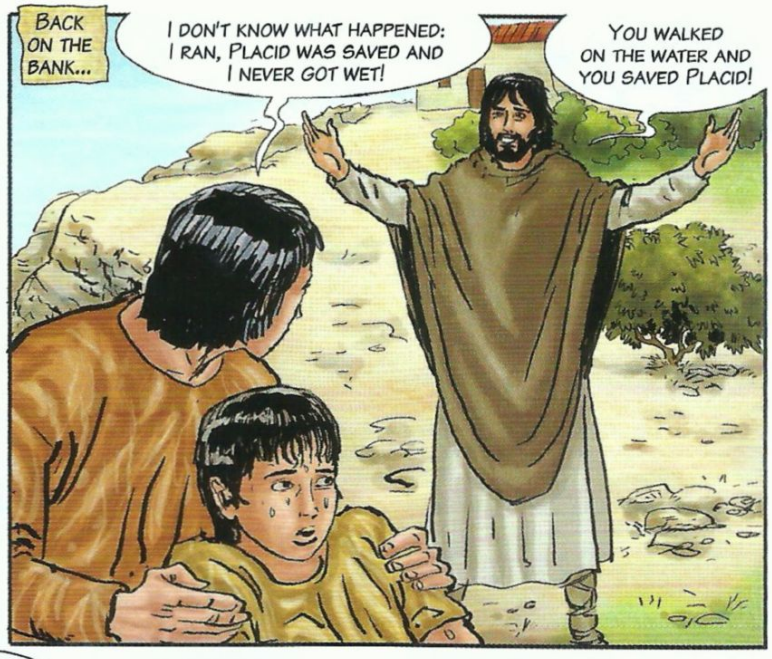

BUT THERE WAS NO RECREATION FOR BENEDICT. HE WAS ALWAYS ON THE GO, FIGURING OUT THE BEST WAY TO DEAL WITH THE MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL PROBLEMS OF HIS EXPANDING COMMUNITY...
THIS SOLITARY MAN BECAME A GREAT ORGANISER, DRAWING HIS STRENGTH FROM PRAYER AND MEDITATION.
19

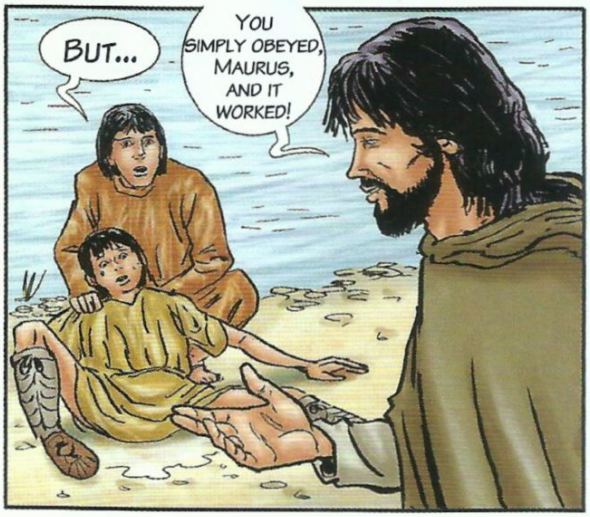
*THIS WOULD BECOME ST CLEMENT MONASTERY **THE FIRST NOVICIATE

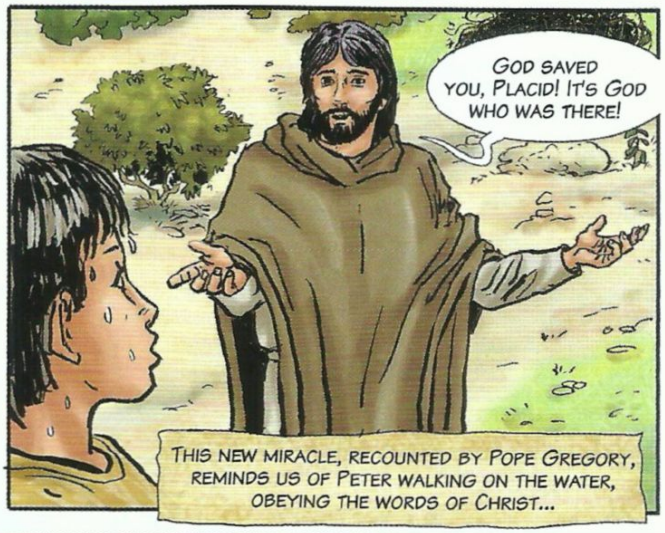
ONE DAY BENEDICT RECEIVED A VISIT FROM THREE DESPERATE MONKS...
FATHER BENEDICT, OUR MONASTERIES ARE UP THERE ON THE MOUNTAIN WITHOUT WATER. EVERY DAY WE HAVE TO COME DOWN TO THE LAKE TO GET WATER.
WE RISK OUR LIVES BECAUSE OF THE STEEP SLOPE.
WE NEED TO MOVE THE MONASTERIES AS YOU HAVE DONE SEVERAL TIMES ALREADY...
FOLLOW ME, PLACID, AND YOU'LL SEE!
HERE WE ARE!
THESE STONES WILL MARK THIS SPOT FOR OUR BROTHERS!
AND NOW LET'S PRAY!
THE NEXT DAY...
MY BROTHERS, GO BACK UP YOUR MOUNTAIN. I'VE PLACED THREE STONES ON TOP OF A ROCK. DIG A BIT, AND YOU'LL FIND OUT WHAT THE ALMIGHTY WILL DO FOR YOU...!
AND AS BENEDICT HAD PREDICTED...
LOOK, WATER... A SPRING!
IT'S A MIRACLE! GLORY BE TO GOD!
A MIRACLE LIKE THE ONE WORKED BY MOSES IN THE SINAI DESERT...
BENEDICT WELCOMED THE CHILDREN OF THE POOREST ITALIAN FAMILIES INTO HIS COMMUNITY, AS WELL AS THE RICHEST, AND STRANGERS... ONE DAY, AN ENERGETIC GOTH WHO HAD BEEN ACCEPTED AS A POSTULANT WAS ASSIGNED TO WOOD-CLEARING BY THE LAKE.
THEN...
EH !?!
OH, NO!
WHAT'S FATHER BENEDICT GOING TO SAY?
20

A LITTLE LATER...
YOU TALKED TO BROTHER MAURUS, AND HE TOLD ME ALL ABOUT YOUR TEARS AND SORROW.
SO GIVE ME THAT HANDLE!
NOW WATCH CLOSELY!
HERE'S THE AXE AND IT'S MENDED. NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD!
GO BACK TO WORK AND DON'T BE SAD ANY MORE!
AND SO A WONDROUS EVENT TOOK PLACE IN SUBIACO JUST LIKE ONE THAT CENTURIES AGO THE PROPHET ELISHA DESCRIBED ...
ANO-THER DAY...
PLACID! DON'T RUSH SO FAST TO FETCH WATER; YOU COULD END UP FALLING!
OH!
PLOP
BROTHER MAURUS, QUICK! PLACID HAS FALLEN IN THE LAKE AND IS DROWNING!
?
21

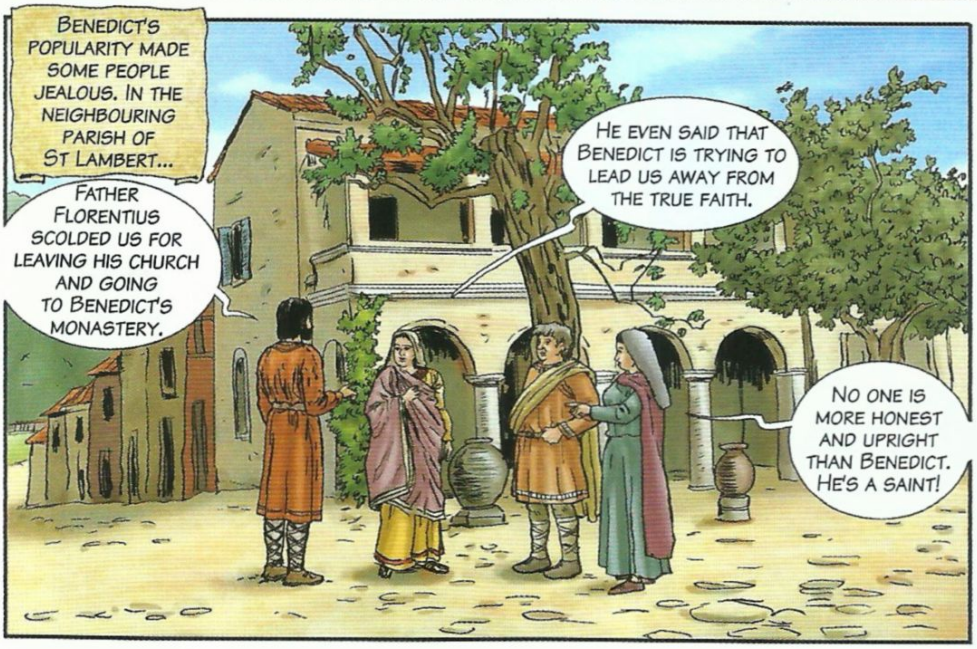


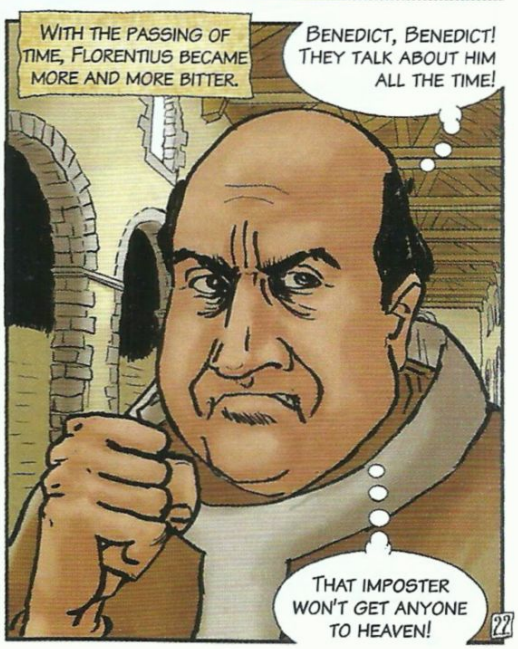

BACK ON THE BANK...
I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED: I RAN, PLACID WAS SAVED AND I NEVER GOT WET!
YOU WALKED ON THE WATER AND YOU SAVED PLACID!



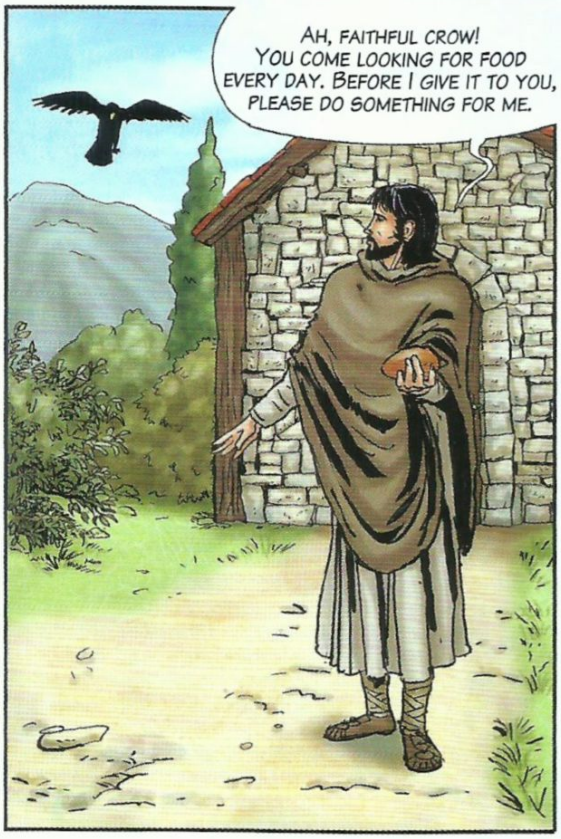

GOD SAVED YOU, PLACID! IT'S GOD WHO WAS THERE!
THIS NEW MIRACLE, RECOUNTED BY POPE GREGORY, REMINDS US OF PETER WALKING ON THE WATER, OBEYING THE WORDS OF CHRIST...

POPE GREGORY, EDITING THE LIFE OF BENEDICT, SAW THE BIBLICAL BACKGROUND AS FUNDAMENTAL FOR HIS FUTURE READERS. THESE LAST THREE EVENTS SUMMARISE GOD'S CONSTANT ACTION IN HUMAN HISTORY, WITH MOSES FOR THE LAW, ELISHA FOR THE PROPHETS AND PETER FOR THE GOSPEL.

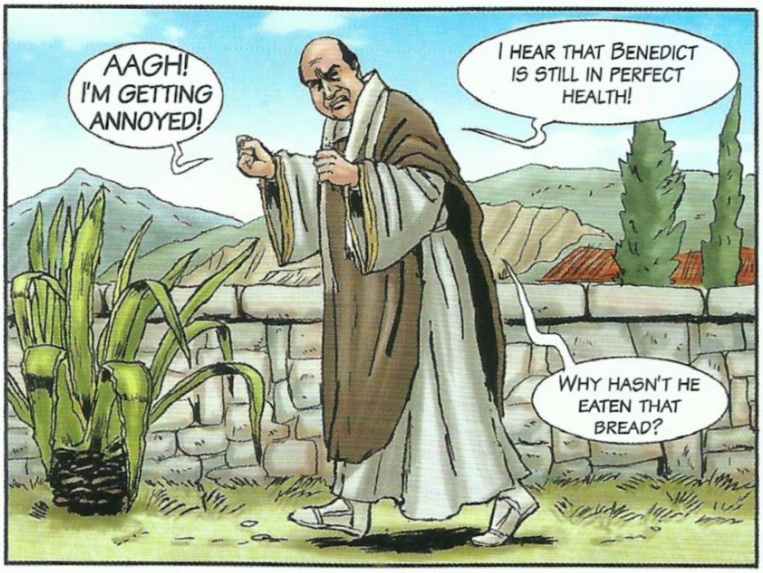

BENEDICT'S POPULARITY MADE SOME PEOPLE JEALOUS. IN THE NEIGHBOURING PARISH OF ST LAMBERT...
FATHER FLORENTIUS SCOLDED US FOR LEAVING HIS CHURCH AND GOING TO BENEDICT'S MONASTERY.
HE EVEN SAID THAT BENEDICT IS TRYING TO LEAD US AWAY FROM THE TRUE FAITH.
NO ONE IS MORE HONEST AND UPRIGHT THAN BENEDICT. HE'S A SAINT!

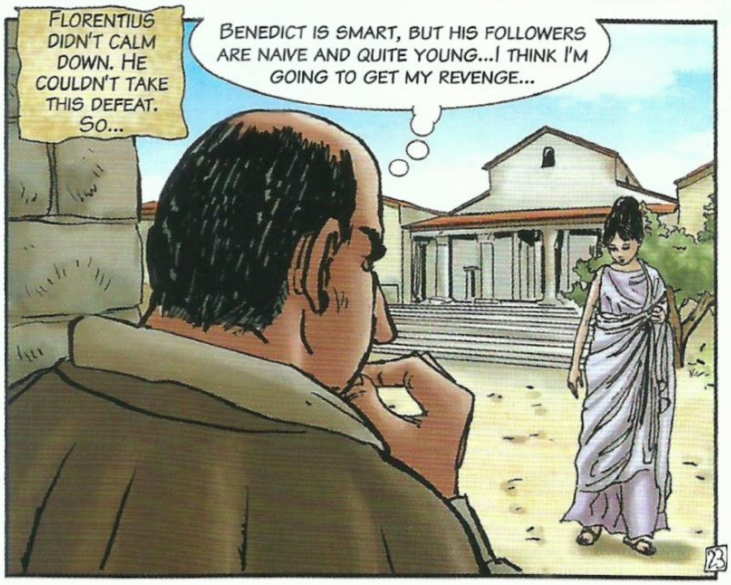

WITH THE PASSING OF TIME, FLORENTIUS BECAME MORE AND MORE BITTER.
BENEDICT, BENEDICT! THEY TALK ABOUT HIM ALL THE TIME!
THAT IMPOSTER WON'T GET ANYONE TO HEAVEN!
22

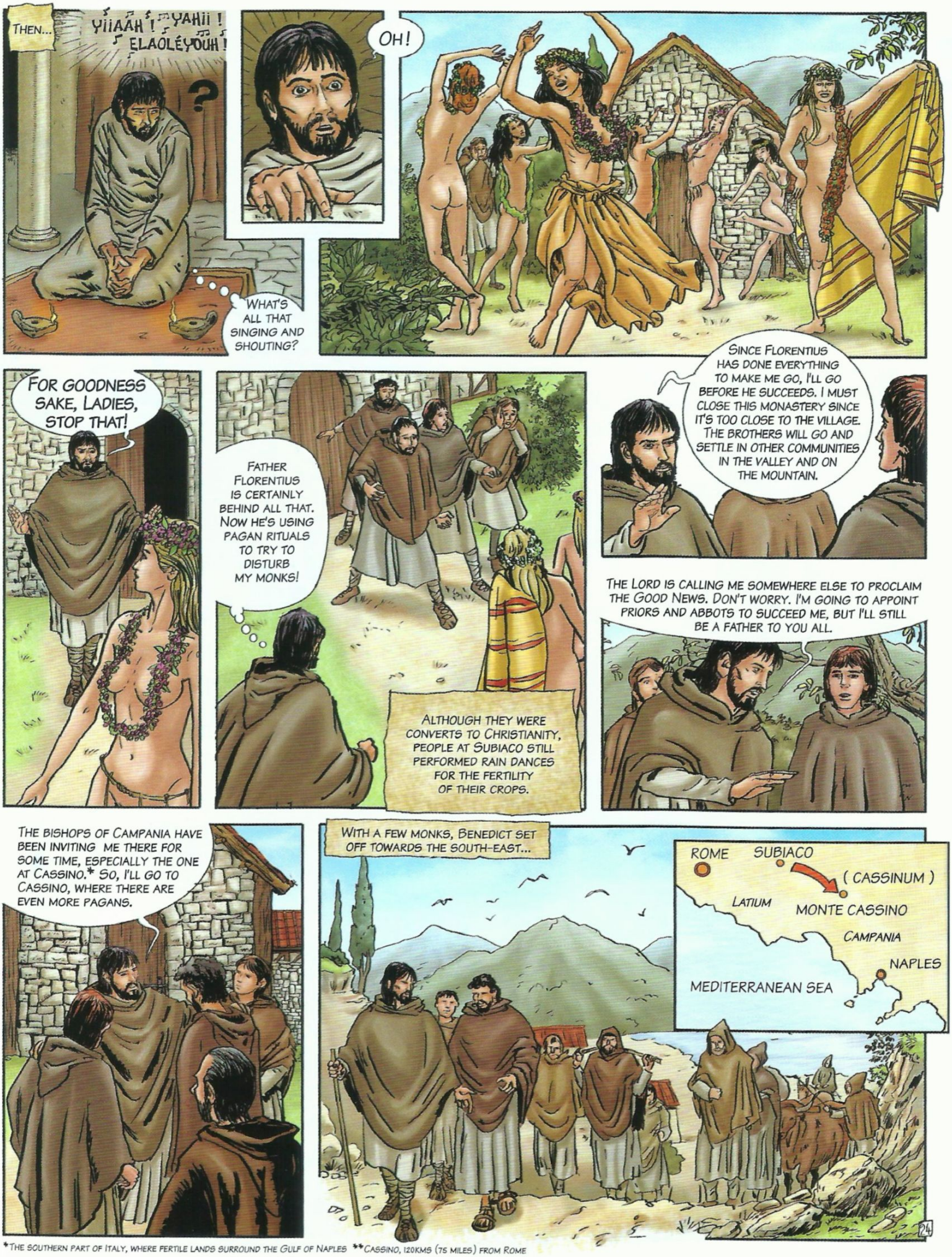
FATHER FLORENTIUS TOLD ME TO GIVE YOU THIS BLESSED BREAD AS A SIGN OF FRIENDSHIP AND BROTHERHOOD.
THANK HIM, MY CHILD. THANK HIM VERY MUCH! I'M REALLY TOUCHED!



THIS EVENT ALSO REMINDS US OF AN EPISODE FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT WHERE THE PROPHET ELIJAH WAS FED BY CROWS (1 KINGS 17:6). THIS STORY STARTED THE NICKNAME OF "CROWS" FOR BENEDICTINES, WHO DRESS IN BLACK.

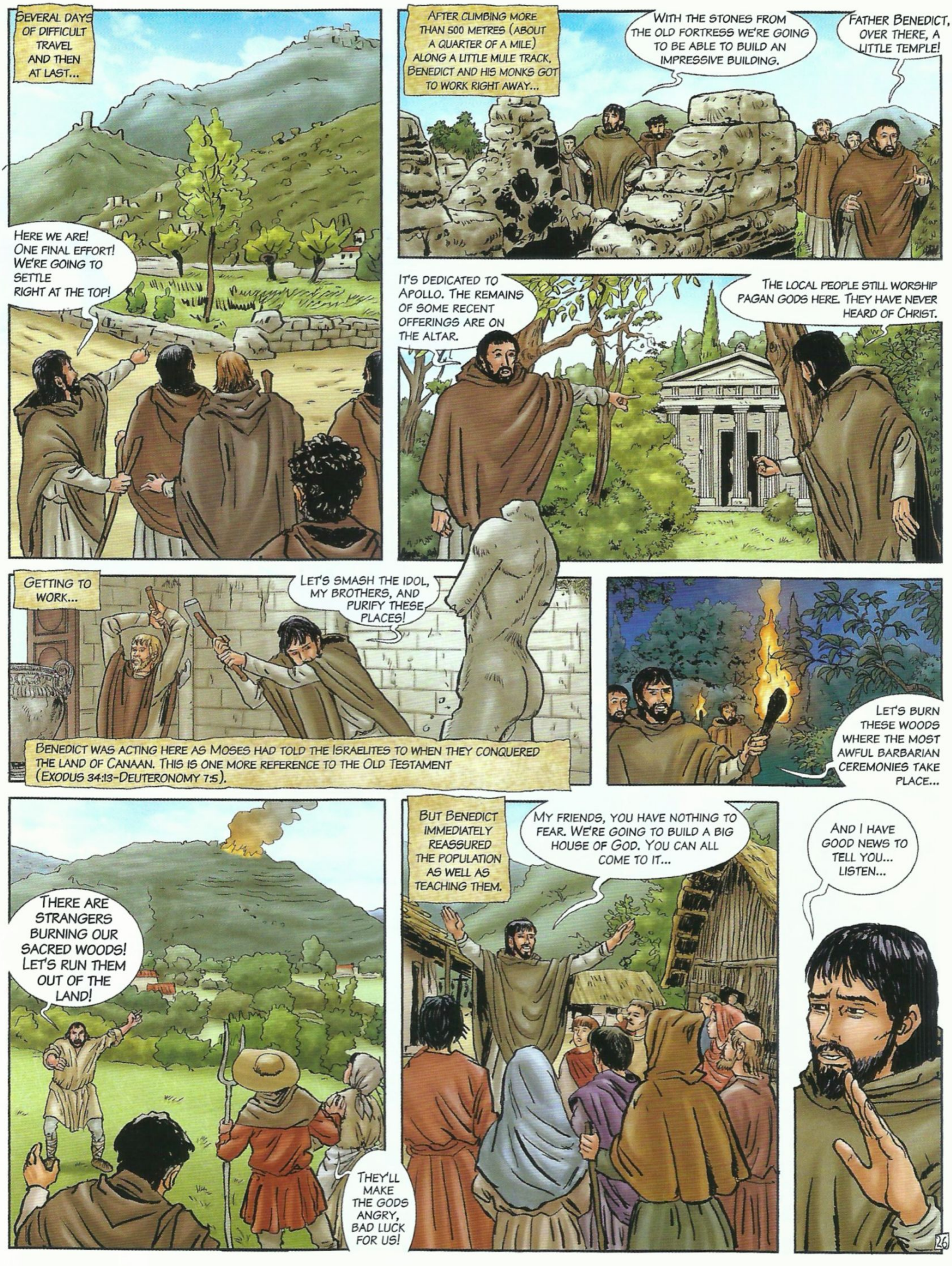



FLORENTIUS DIDN'T CALM DOWN. HE COULDN'T TAKE THIS DEFEAT. SO...
BENEDICT IS SMART, BUT HIS FOLLOWERS ARE NAIVE AND QUITE YOUNG...I THINK I'M GOING TO GET MY REVENGE...


THEN...
YIIAAH ! YAHii ! ELAOLÉYOUH !
?
WHAT'S ALL THAT SINGING AND SHOUTING?
OH!
FOR GOODNESS SAKE, LADIES, STOP THAT!
FATHER FLORENTIUS IS CERTAINLY BEHIND ALL THAT. NOW HE'S USING PAGAN RITUALS TO TRY TO DISTURB MY MONKS!
ALTHOUGH THEY WERE CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY, PEOPLE AT SUBIACO STILL PERFORMED RAIN DANCES FOR THE FERTILITY OF THEIR CROPS.
SINCE FLORENTIUS HAS DONE EVERYTHING TO MAKE ME GO, I'LL GO BEFORE HE SUCCEEDS. I MUST CLOSE THIS MONASTERY SINCE IT'S TOO CLOSE TO THE VILLAGE. THE BROTHERS WILL GO AND SETTLE IN OTHER COMMUNITIES IN THE VALLEY AND ON THE MOUNTAIN.
THE LORD IS CALLING ME SOMEWHERE ELSE TO PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS. DON'T WORRY. I'M GOING TO APPOINT PRIORS AND ABBOTS TO SUCCEED ME, BUT I'LL STILL BE A FATHER TO YOU ALL.
THE BISHOPS OF CAMPANIA HAVE BEEN INVITING ME THERE FOR SOME TIME, ESPECIALLY THE ONE AT CASSINO.* SO, I'LL GO TO CASSINO, WHERE THERE ARE EVEN MORE PAGANS.
WITH A FEW MONKS, BENEDICT SET OFF TOWARDS THE SOUTH-EAST...
ROME
SUBIACO
(CASSINUM)
LATIUM
MONTE CASSINO
CAMPANIA
NAPLES
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
24

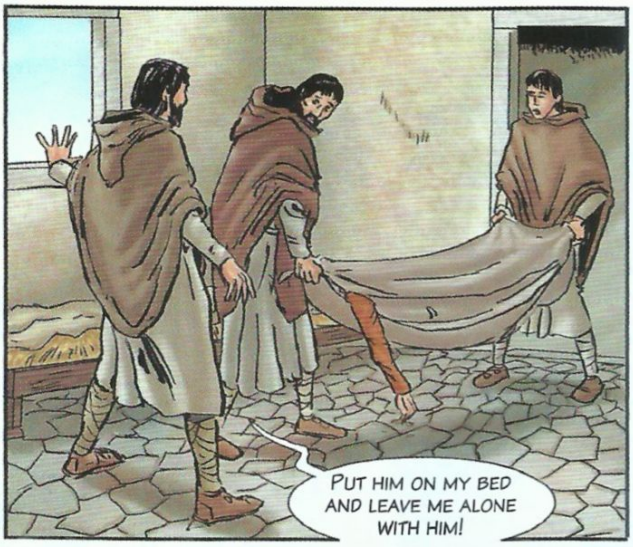
*THE SOUTHERN PART OF ITALY, WHERE FERTILE LANDS SURROUND THE GULF OF NAPLES **CASSINO, 120KMS (75 MILES) FROM ROME

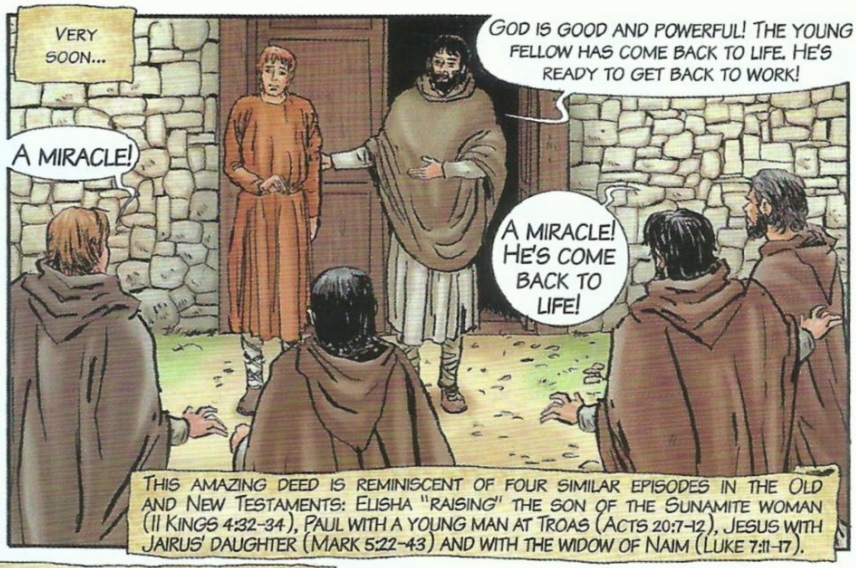
FLORENTIUS COULDN'T CONTAIN HIS JOY...
HA HA!
HA HA! THERE GOES THAT NUISANCE OF A NEIGHBOUR OUT OF THE WAY! MY PLAN WORKED...
I WON...
WHAT?
AAGH!
THAT EVENING THEY STOPPED ABOUT 10 MILES FROM SUBIACO...
FATHER, FATHER, COME BACK TO US! THE PRIEST WHO WAS PERSECUTING YOU HAS JUST DIED...
WHAT?
THE POOR SOUL! O LORD, FORGIVE HIM! HAVE MERCY ON HIM!
HE DESERVED IT. THE BALCONY WHERE HE WAS STANDING COLLAPSED. HE DIED INSTANTLY. SO YOU CAN COME BACK TO SUBIACO!
KNEEL DOWN! LET'S PRAY FOR THIS PRIEST WHO HAS GONE ASTRAY. LET'S PRAY..!
BENEDICT'S COMPASSION FOR HIS ENEMY RECALLS THAT OF DAVID OVER THE DEATH OF SAUL (II SAMUEL 1:11-12). JESUS ALSO ASKS US TO PRAY, "FORGIVE US AS WE FORGIVE..." (MATTHEW 6:12). AND PAUL OF TARSUS WROTE TO THE ROMANS, "BLESS THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU; BLESS THEM, DON'T CURSE THEM. DON'T LET YOURSELF BE CONQUERED BY EVIL. OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD" (ROMANS 12:14-21).
THE LORD IS CALLING ME ELSEWHERE, MAURUS.
THESE EVENTS PROVE IT... BESIDES, BROTHER, HOW CAN YOU SAY SUCH A THING?
INCAPABLE OF HATRED, BENEDICT WAS COMPLETELY FILLED WITH THE EXAMPLE AND TEACHING OF JESUS. FROM NOW ON A NEW EPISODE IN HIS LIFE WAS ABOUT TO BEGIN...
23

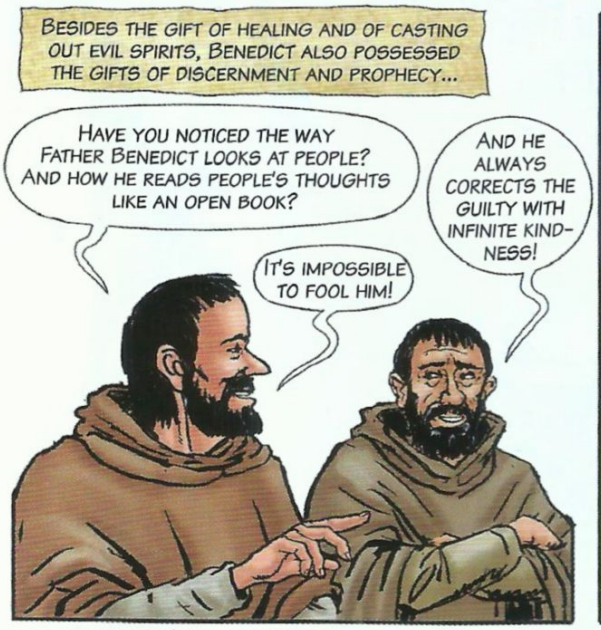

Several days of difficult travel and then at last...
Here we are! One final effort! We're going to settle right at the top!
After climbing more than 500 metres (about a quarter of a mile) along a little mule track, Benedict and his monks got to work right away...
With the stones from the old fortress we're going to be able to build an impressive building.
Father Benedict, over there, a little temple!
It's dedicated to Apollo. The remains of some recent offerings are on the altar.
The local people still worship pagan gods here. They have never heard of Christ.
Getting to work...
Let's smash the idol, my brothers, and purify these places!
Benedict was acting here as Moses had told the Israelites to when they conquered the land of Canaan. This is one more reference to the Old Testament (Exodus 34:13-Deuteronomy 7:5).
Let's burn these woods where the most awful barbarian ceremonies take place...
There are strangers burning our sacred woods! Let's run them out of the land!
They'll make the gods angry, bad luck for us!
But Benedict immediately reassured the population as well as teaching them.
My friends, you have nothing to fear. We're going to build a big house of God. You can all come to it...
And I have good news to tell you... listen...
26

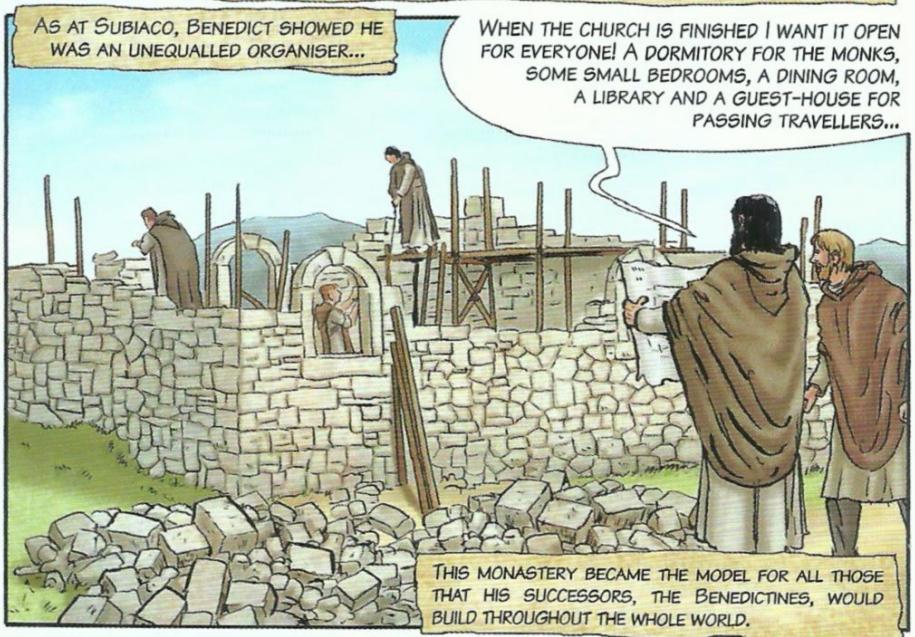
A MONUMENTAL* TASK THEN BEGAN ON MONTE CASSINO...
WE'LL TRANSFORM THE PAGAN TEMPLE INTO AN ORATORY. WE'LL DEDICATE IT TO BLESSED MARTIN. HE WAS A MISSIONARY INVOLVED IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST IDOLATRY...
WHERE THE PAGAN ALTAR USED TO BE, WE'LL BUILD ANOTHER ORATORY. AND WE'LL DEDICATE IT TO ST JOHN THE BAPTIST, PATRON OF HERMITS AND MONKS.
BENEDICT OFTEN HAD TO ENCOURAGE HIS FOLLOWERS WHO THOUGHT THEY HEARD DEMONS HOWLING AND THREATENING AND COMPLAINING ABOUT BEING CAST OUT OF THEIR SANCTUARIES. IN THOSE DAYS THE PAGAN GODS WERE OFTEN CONSIDERED DEMONS...
THAT CRY CAME FROM THE DEPTHS OF HELL!
DON'T WORRY AT ALL, MY FRIENDS. CHRIST HAS CONQUERED ALL THINGS! LET'S PRAY, AND EVIL WON'T HURT US.
THE BATTLE AGAINST THE PRESUMED DEMONS LASTED THE WHOLE TIME THE MONASTERY WAS BEING BUILT...
FIRE! FIRE! THE DEVIL!
CALM DOWN, BROTHERS! MAKE THE SIGN OF THE CROSS AND ORDER WILL RETURN. YOU'RE JUST VICTIMS OF ONE OF SATAN'S TRICKS!
THE MONKS WERE STILL LEARNERS IN THE ART OF BUILDING...
CRRRAAAC!
AAAAAH!
HELP!
FATHER, FATHER, THE WALL WE WERE BUILDING HAS JUST COLLAPSED ON TOP OF A BROTHER!
GOD HELP US!
THE POOR MAN IS DEAD! ALL HIS BONES ARE CRUSHED!
MORE WORK OF THE DEVIL! BRING HIM HERE QUICKLY!
27

* A GIGANTIC JOB

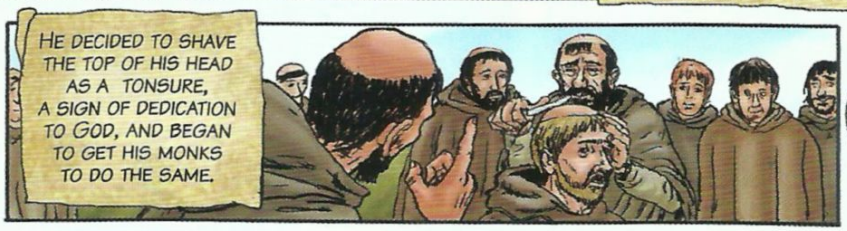


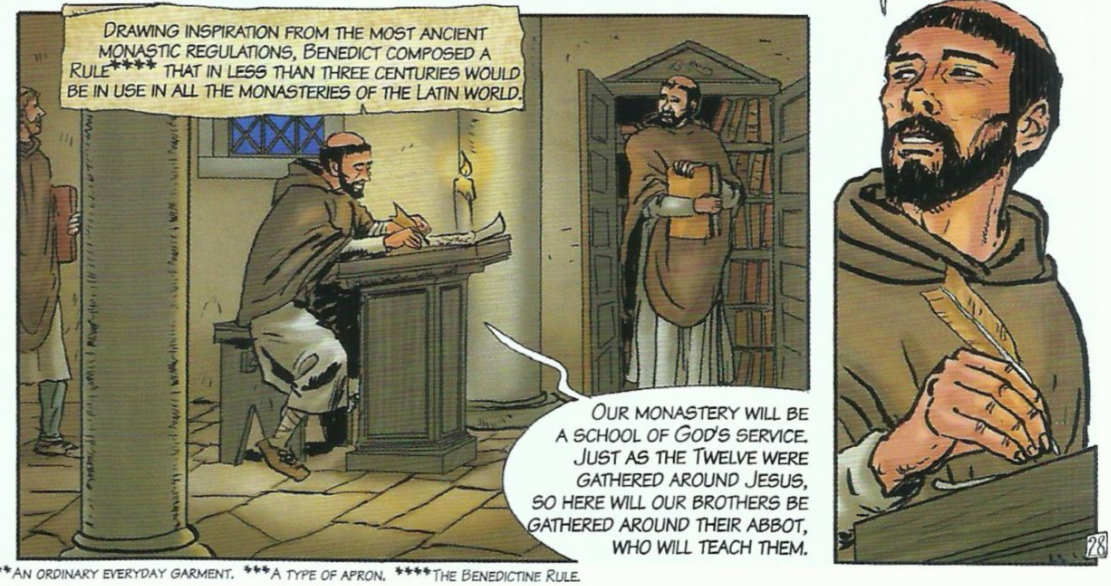

VERY SOON...
A MIRACLE!
GOD IS GOOD AND POWERFUL! THE YOUNG FELLOW HAS COME BACK TO LIFE. HE'S READY TO GET BACK TO WORK!
A MIRACLE! HE'S COME BACK TO LIFE!
THIS AMAZING DEED IS REMINISCENT OF FOUR SIMILAR EPISODES IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS: ELISHA "RAISING" THE SON OF THE SUNAMITE WOMAN (II KINGS 4:32-34), PAUL WITH A YOUNG MAN AT TROAS (ACTS 20:7-12), JESUS WITH JAIRUS' DAUGHTER (MARK 5:22-43) AND WITH THE WIDOW OF NAIM (LUKE 7:11-17).


BESIDES THE GIFT OF HEALING AND OF CASTING OUT EVIL SPIRITS, BENEDICT ALSO POSSESSED THE GIFTS OF DISCERNMENT AND PROPHECY...
HAVE YOU NOTICED THE WAY FATHER BENEDICT LOOKS AT PEOPLE? AND HOW HE READS PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS LIKE AN OPEN BOOK?
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO FOOL HIM!
AND HE ALWAYS CORRECTS THE GUILTY WITH INFINITE KINDNESS!


AS AT SUBIACO, BENEDICT SHOWED HE WAS AN UNEQUALLED ORGANISER...
WHEN THE CHURCH IS FINISHED I WANT IT OPEN FOR EVERYONE! A DORMITORY FOR THE MONKS, SOME SMALL BEDROOMS, A DINING ROOM, A LIBRARY AND A GUEST-HOUSE FOR PASSING TRAVELLERS...
THIS MONASTERY BECAME THE MODEL FOR ALL THOSE THAT HIS SUCCESSORS, THE BENEDICTINES, WOULD BUILD THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD.

BENEDICT ORGANISED THE MONASTERY'S LIFE TO THE LAST DETAIL, EVEN THE CLOTHING...
INSTEAD OF ANIMAL SKINS, WE'RE WEARING A COWL* OVER A TUNIC** THAT THAT'S FASTENED BY A BELT. IN THE FUTURE YOU WILL WEAR A SCAPULAR*** FOR WORK.


HE DECIDED TO SHAVE THE TOP OF HIS HEAD AS A TONSURE, A SIGN OF DEDICATION TO GOD, AND BEGAN TO GET HIS MONKS TO DO THE SAME.
WE'LL BE A MODEL FOR THE WORLD, PRACTISING AND LIVING THE GOSPEL FULLY!

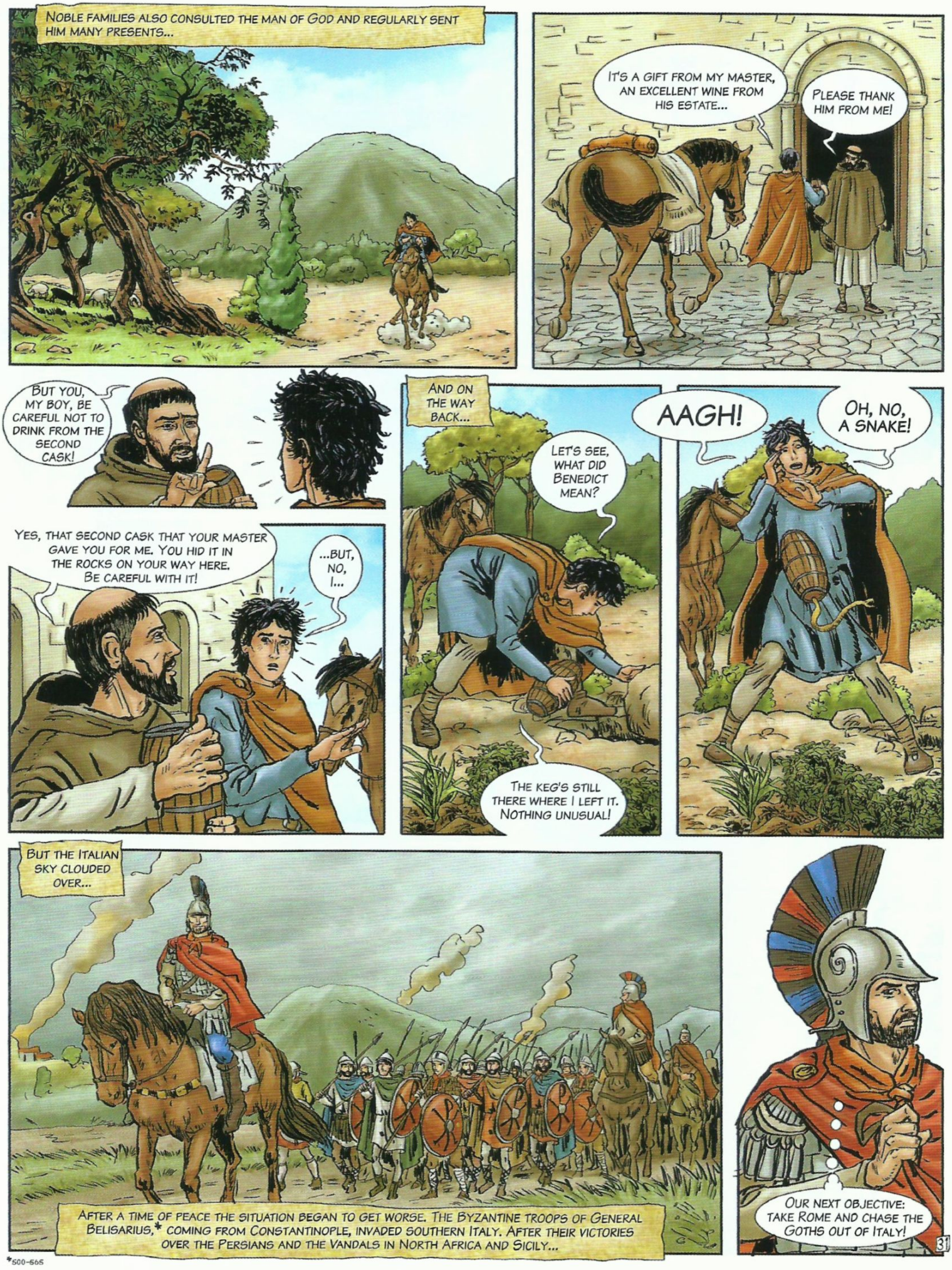

DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM THE MOST ANCIENT MONASTIC REGULATIONS, BENEDICT COMPOSED A RULE**** THAT IN LESS THAN THREE CENTURIES WOULD BE IN USE IN ALL THE MONASTERIES OF THE LATIN WORLD.
OUR MONASTERY WILL BE A SCHOOL OF GOD'S SERVICE. JUST AS THE TWELVE WERE GATHERED AROUND JESUS, SO HERE WILL OUR BROTHERS BE GATHERED AROUND THEIR ABBOT, WHO WILL TEACH THEM.
28

*AN OUTER GARMENT, A TYPE OF CAPE WITH A LARGE HOOD. **AN ORDINARY EVERYDAY GARMENT. ***A TYPE OF APRON. ****THE BENEDICTINE RULE.

THE MONKS' DAY WAS DIVIDED INTO COMMUNITY PRAYER, READING THE BIBLE, MEDITATION AND MANUAL WORK...
...IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT I RISE AND GIVE YOU THANKS FOR YOUR JUST DECISIONS...
"PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING" IS THE AIM OF MONASTIC LIFE. PRAYER IN COMMON TAKES PLACE SEVEN TIMES DURING THE DAY AND ONCE DURING THE NIGHT (2:30 A.M.): MATINS, ALSO CALLED "VIGILS".
EVERY THREE HOURS THEY PRAYED TOGETHER. THESE PRAYERS BECAME KNOWN AS THE DIVINE OFFICE.
IN THE NIGHT: MATINS; AT DAWN: LAUDS; AT SUNRISE: PRIME; IN MID-MORNING: TERCE; AT MIDDAY: SEXT (AT LUNCHTIME); IN MID-AFTERNOON: NONE; AT THE END OF THE DAY: VESPERS, AND AS NIGHT FALLS: COMPLINE.
IN BETWEEN THESE COMMUNAL PRAYERS EACH MONK DEVOTED HIMSELF TO READING AND MEDITATING ON HOLY SCRIPTURE...
...TO WORKING IN THE FIELDS...
THESE MONKS WORK IN SILENCE!
THEY WORK JUST LIKE US AND DON'T GROAN ABOUT IT!
...OR IN THE LIBRARY...
NEXT TO THE LIBRARY BENEDICT HAD A STUDY ROOM BUILT AND A "SCRIPTORIUM", A PLACE WHERE THE MONKS MADE COPIES OF MANY TEXTS AND BOOKS FROM FORMER TIMES.
WE HAVE A DUTY TO PASS ON WHAT OUR ANCESTORS KNEW TO FUTURE GENERATIONS...
THIS WORK WOULD BE CARRIED OUT BY MONASTERIES OVER THE CENTURIES. BECAUSE OF THEIR LABOURS, MOST OF THE KNOWN BOOKS FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD AND THE MIDDLE AGES HAVE COME DOWN TO US.
23

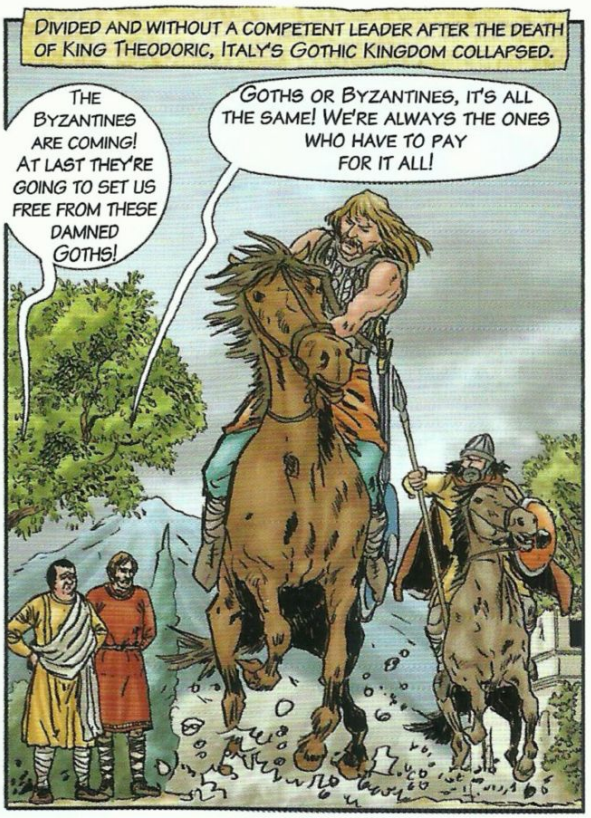
*OR LAUDS.

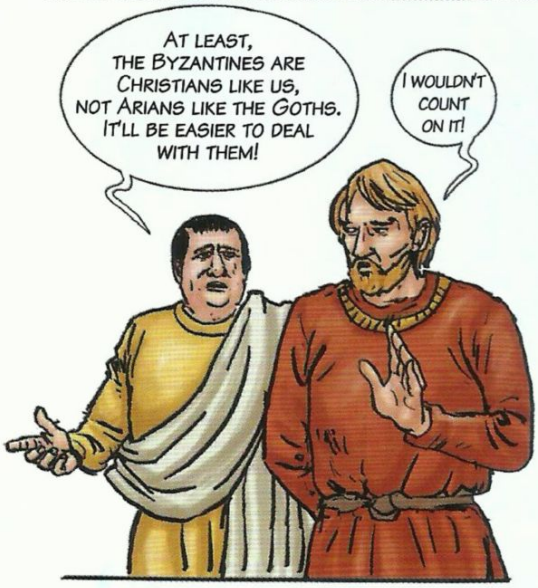
BENEDICT INSISTED THAT ALL HIS MONKS WITHOUT EXCEPTION, WHETHER SONS OF FARMERS OR NOBLES, SHOULD KNOW HOW TO READ AND WRITE...
IN THE REFECTORY (DINING ROOM) THE MONKS ATE IN SILENCE AS THEY LISTENED TO A READING FROM SACRED TEXTS...
GOD CREATED MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE; MAN AND WOMAN HE CREATED THEM...
AT NIGHT AN OIL-LAMP SHONE A DIM LIGHT IN THE DORMITORY, WHERE THE MONKS SLEPT FULLY CLOTHED, WITH A SHEET OR BLANKET ACCORDING TO THE SEASON...
THE MONKS WERE NOT ISOLATED FROM THE WORLD. THE SURROUNDING VILLAGES GOT TO KNOW THEM...
GOD IS LOVE! WE ARE BROTHERS AND SISTERS...
THEY VISITED THE SICK...
...AND CARED FOR THE ORPHANS AND ABANDONED CHILDREN, AND THERE WERE MANY IN THOSE DAYS...
THE SAME VILLAGERS WHO USED TO BE HOSTILE NOW CAME UP TO THE MONASTERY TO ASK FOR ADVICE AND TALK ABOUT THEIR PROBLEMS...
30


NOBLE FAMILIES ALSO CONSULTED THE MAN OF GOD AND REGULARLY SENT HIM MANY PRESENTS...
IT'S A GIFT FROM MY MASTER, AN EXCELLENT WINE FROM HIS ESTATE...
PLEASE THANK HIM FROM ME!
BUT YOU, MY BOY, BE CAREFUL NOT TO DRINK FROM THE SECOND CASK!
AND ON THE WAY BACK...
LET'S SEE, WHAT DID BENEDICT MEAN?
AAGH!
OH, NO, A SNAKE!
YES, THAT SECOND CASK THAT YOUR MASTER GAVE YOU FOR ME. YOU HID IT IN THE ROCKS ON YOUR WAY HERE. BE CAREFUL WITH IT!
...BUT, NO, I...
THE KEG'S STILL THERE WHERE I LEFT IT. NOTHING UNUSUAL!
BUT THE ITALIAN SKY CLOUDED OVER...
AFTER A TIME OF PEACE THE SITUATION BEGAN TO GET WORSE. THE BYZANTINE TROOPS OF GENERAL BELISARIUS,* COMING FROM CONSTANTINOPLE, INVADED SOUTHERN ITALY. AFTER THEIR VICTORIES OVER THE PERSIANS AND THE VANDALS IN NORTH AFRICA AND SICILY...
OUR NEXT OBJECTIVE: TAKE ROME AND CHASE THE GOTHS OUT OF ITALY!
31

*500-565

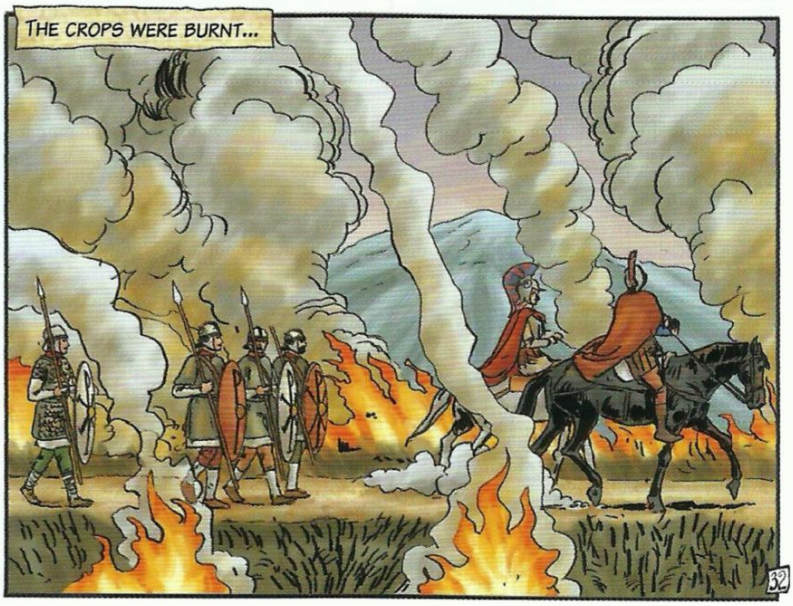
Even against a much larger army of Goths, the Byzantines won victory after victory. They were well-armed and commanded by an exceptional strategist....


Divided and without a competent leader after the death of King Theodoric, Italy's Gothic Kingdom collapsed.
The Byzantines are coming! At last they're going to set us free from these damned Goths!
Goths or Byzantines, it's all the same! We're always the ones who have to pay for it all!


At least, the Byzantines are Christians like us, not Arians like the Goths. It'll be easier to deal with them!
I wouldn't count on it!

Naples fell...

The villages were looted...


The crops were burnt...
32

AT MONTE CASSINO...
FROM NOW ON BELISARIUS RULES IN ROME!
HUNGER'S THREATENING HERE, AND THE COUNTRY PEOPLE ARE KNOCKING AT OUR MONASTERY DOOR.
WE STILL HAVE SOME PROVISIONS IN RESERVE. LET'S GIVE THEM OUT WITHOUT COUNTING THE COST...
POPE GREGORY, WHO WAS RECOUNTING BENEDICT'S LIFE 40 YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH, SAW TWO NEW MIRACLES IN THIS DRAMATIC SITUATION...
FATHER, WE HAVE NO FLOUR LEFT. WE'VE ONLY GOT FIVE LOAVES LEFT FOR SUPPER...
AND AFTERWARDS?
MEN OF LITTLE FAITH!
WHY ARE YOU GETTING UPSET ABOUT THIS LACK OF BREAD?
TODAY THERE'S A FOOD SHORTAGE; TOMORROW THERE'LL BE A SURPLUS!
AND THE NEXT DAY...
A MIRACLE!
GOD HAS HONOURED THE FAITH OF OUR FATHER, BENEDICT!
WE FIND MIRACLES LIKE THIS TIME AND TIME AGAIN IN THE LIVES OF EARLIER SAINTS. THEY REMIND US OF THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES BY JESUS.
ON ANOTHER OCCASION, THE OIL HAD JUST RUN OUT...
DID YOU GIVE AWAY THE LAST DROPS OF THE OIL IN THE LITTLE JAR, AS I TOLD YOU?
ERR...NO!
HERE'S THE JAR! IF I HADN'T KEPT SOME, THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN NOTHING FOR THE BROTHERS...
AS SOON AS BENEDICT FOUND OUT ABOUT THE JAR...
BECAUSE OF YOUR DISOBEDIENCE NOT A DROP OF OIL WILL REMAIN HERE!
33

AND NOW, MY BROTHERS, LET'S PRAY.
WHAT'S THAT?
DRIP
DRIP
?
LOOK AT THE OIL!
THE BARREL'S OVERFLOWING; GOD'S HEARD OUR PRAYER!
THAT'S WHAT IT IS!
DRIP
DRIP
LOOK! WHEN BENEDICT FINISHED PRAYING THE OIL STOPPED RUNNING!
MY BROTHERS, BE OBEDIENT AND NEVER DOUBT; GOD WILL GIVE US WHAT WE NEED IN HIS OWN GOOD TIME!
A MIRACLE LIKE THE ONE WORKED BY THE PROPHET ELISHA AT THE HOME OF THE WIDOW OF SAREPTA (II KINGS 4:1-7).
THE WAR AND THE BYZANTINE OCCUPATION CONTINUED. NEVERTHELESS, BENEDICT CONTINUED WRITING HIS FAMOUS "RULE" IN SOLITUDE, NEVER TAKING SIDES...
IN CONSTANTINOPLE, EMPEROR JUSTINIAN DREAMED OF REBUILDING THE FORMER ROMAN EMPIRE. THE NEWS HE RECEIVED EACH DAY BROUGHT HIM COMFORT AND HOPE.
EXCELLENT! THE NEWS FROM ITALY IS EXCELLENT!
BELISARIUS HAS JUST BEATEN THE GOTH, KING VITIGES, WHO WAS GETTING READY TO RE-CONQUER ROME...
I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
34

WHY DON'T YOU BELIEVE THAT?
NOTHING HAS BEEN CAPTURED ONCE AND FOR ALL AND SOME GOTH TROOPS REMAIN ARMED NORTH OF THE RIVER PO!
I FEEL SURE THAT BELISARIUS WILL CONQUER ALL OF ITALY.
HOWEVER, BELISARIUS WAS CALLED TO CONSTANTINOPLE IN 541. THE BYZANTINE LEADERS WHO REPLACED HIM DREAMED MORE ABOUT THEIR OWN INTERESTS THAN THOSE OF THE EMPIRE...
THE SITUATION CAN'T GO ON. THE BYZANTINES ARE CRUSHING US WITH TAXES!
OUR NEW MASTERS ONLY DREAM ABOUT MAKING THEMSELVES RICH! PEOPLE ARE STARTING TO WANT THE GOTHS TO COME BACK!
REGROUPED IN THE NORTH OF THE PENINSULA, THE OSTROGOTHS HAD JUST CHOSEN A TOP-RATE WARRIOR AS THEIR KING, A YOUNG AND AMBITIOUS MAN CALLED TOTILA. WAR BEGAN AGAIN AND THE BYZANTINES RETREATED...
VICTORY
TOTILA
HURRAH!
LONG LIVE OUR KING!
THE RE-CONQUEST BY THE GOTHS WAS A BLOODY AFFAIR. MASSACRES ABOUNDED, FAMINES AND EPIDEMICS RAVAGED THE COUNTRY. THE ORDINARY COUNTRY FOLK SUFFERED GREATLY...
DAMNED DOG, ARE YOU GOING TO TALK? WHERE DID YOU HIDE YOUR MONEY?
I'M POOR, SIR. YOU CAN SEE THE WAR HAS RUINED ME!
THEY ALL SAY THAT! WE KNOW HOW TO MAKE THEM TALK!
WELL, IF YOU'RE SO POOR, WHY BOTHER GOING ON LIVING?
NO, WAIT! IT'S TRUE, I HAVE SOME MONEY BUT I'VE GIVEN IT TO BENEDICT, THE ABBOT OF MONTE CASSINO!
ALL RIGHT, WE'LL GO TOGETHER AND ASK HIM FOR IT. IF YOU'RE LYING YOU'LL REGRET STILL BEING ALIVE!
THAT'S RIGHT!
ARE YOU BENEDICT?
YES, THAT'S MY NAME.
THIS FARMER WANTS THE MONEY BACK HE GAVE YOU!
THE MOMENT FATHER BENEDICT LOOKED AT THE POOR MAN, HIS ROPES FELL FROM HIM.
?
AAGH! THIS IS MAGIC!
35

GOD IS WITH YOU. FORGIVE ME!
STAND UP, ZALLA. THAT IS YOUR NAME, ISN'T IT? COME AND SHARE A PIECE OF BLESSED BREAD WITH ME.
AND WHILE ONE OF THE BROTHERS TAKES CARE OF THE POOR FARMER...
ZALLA, TAKE THIS AND STOP YOUR CRUELTY FROM NOW ON.
PRAY FOR ME, HOLY MAN! I PROMISE I WON'T MISTREAT THE LOCAL FARMERS ANY MORE.
IT HAPPENED THAT SOME TIME LATER KING TOTILA, LEADING HIS TROOPS, STOPPED AT THE FOOT OF MONTE CASSINO.
PEOPLE HAVE A LOT TO SAY ABOUT THAT BENEDICT WHO LIVES UP THERE. I'D LIKE TO MEET HIM. BUT IS HE REALLY THE PROPHET THEY SAY HE IS?
I'VE GOT AN IDEA, RIGGO MY FRIEND. LISTEN, THIS IS WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO...
?
FATHER BENEDICT, KING TOTILA WANTS TO SEE YOU. HE'S COMING WITH AN IMPORTANT ESCORT!
KING TOTILA?
WELL, THEN, I'LL SEE HIM!!
DESPITE APPEARANCES, YOU'RE NOT THE KING. YOU'RE CAPTAIN RIGGO.
GO AND TELL YOUR MASTER TO COME HIMSELF. I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY TO HIM!
36

RIGGO REPORTED TO THE KING...
HE REALISED THAT I WASN'T THE KING. HE SMILED AT US AND WE FOUND OURSELVES FLAT ON OUR FACES.
RIGHT, I'LL GO THEN. BUT YOU CAN BE SURE I WON'T BE BOWING BEFORE HIM.
AND SO...
GREETINGS TO YOU, ABBOT!
YOU WANTED TO TALK TO ME; WELL HERE I AM!
YOU REALLY ARE KING TOTILA!
TOTILA CAN'T HELP HIMSELF...
WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?
?
COME ON, GET UP, MY BROTHER...
...AND LISTEN TO ME!
YOU'RE DOING A LOT OF BAD THINGS, TOTILA...A LOT! STOP THE INJUSTICES. CONTROL YOUR MEN!
LISTEN, I'M TELLING YOU, YOU WILL ENTER ROME. YOU WILL CROSS THE SEA AND RULE FOR NINE YEARS; IN THE TENTH YEAR YOU WILL DIE...
PRAY FOR ME, MAN OF GOD... I...
IN FACT, TOTILA SEIZED NAPLES FIRST AND ON DECEMBER 17, 546, IT WAS ROME'S TURN.
I'LL HAVE THIS CITY'S WALLS KNOCKED DOWN. BUT, AS I PROMISED BENEDICT, THE PEOPLE WON'T SUFFER ANY ILL TREATMENT, AND LOOTING CHURCHES WILL BE FORBIDDEN.
TOTILA EXTENDED HIS DOMINATION OVER SICILY, SARDINIA AND CORSICA. BUT JUSTINIAN WASN'T FINISHED YET. IN 551 A POWERFUL ARMY UNDER THE COMMAND OF THE ARMENIAN NARSES ANNIHILATED THE OSTROGOTH FLEET OFF ANCONA. THE FOLLOWING YEAR TOTILA DIED AT THE BATTLE OF TAGINA. IN 553 THE BYZANTINES WERE ONCE MORE MASTERS OF ITALY. BUT FOR HOW LONG?
BENEDICT KEPT UP HIS WORK OF DEVELOPING THE RULE. HE WAS BUSY WITH THE MONASTERIES OF THE ANIO VALLEY THAT HE HAD FOUNDED AROUND THE LAKE AT SUBIACO, AND WITH A COMMUNITY AT TERRACINA.*
37

*AT THE REQUEST OF A MAN OF FAITH WHO HANDED OVER HIS ESTATE TO BENEDICT.

Every year he also used to meet his sister some distance away from the monastery. Scholastica, dedicated to God from her childhood, lived with other nuns in a monastery not far from there. One evening in 547, after supper...
It will be time for both of us to go soon.
Benedict, I beg you, don't leave me tonight. Let's talk until morning about the joys of eternal life.
What are you suggesting, sister? You know I'm not allowed to spend the night outside the monastery!
Scholastica, I need to leave!
BRAAAOOMM
?
A thunderstorm? The sky was clear a few minutes ago!
It's impossible to leave now... My sister! What have you done?
I asked you to stay and you didn't listen to me. So I turned to God, and he heard my prayer. Leave now if you can.
Well, I can't leave now! So I'll stay.
At sunrise, they returned to their monasteries. Scholastica realized that this was her last time to be with the brother she loved.
Benedict intended to keep the Rule as a good monk. But: "God is love; the more someone loves God, the more powerful she is with him." Since Scholastica's love was greater, her influence with God was greater than Benedict's.
38

AND TWO DAYS LATER, WHILE BENEDICT WAS PRAYING IN HIS ROOM...
OH, THAT DOVE!!!
I... I UNDERSTAND. MY DEAR SISTER SCHOLASTICA HAS JUST DIED AND IS ENTERING PARADISE!
REJOICE, MY BROTHERS! I NOW KNOW THAT MY SISTER IS IN GLORY. GO AND FIND HER BODY AND CARRY IT HERE!
AND...
SHE'LL SLEEP IN MY OWN GRAVE IN THE ST JOHN THE BAPTIST ORATORY UP THERE ON THE MOUNTAIN, WHILE SHE WAITS FOR ME TO COME AND JOIN HER.
THE TIME WAS NEAR. BENEDICT WAS FRAIL. HE TOLD SOME CLOSE FRIENDS...
I KNOW I'M GOING TO LEAVE THIS WORLD VERY SOON...
I KNOW WHICH DAY; BUT DON'T GO SPREADING IT AROUND. THE OTHERS WILL SEE THE SIGNS...
THEN...
FATHER BENEDICT HAS A HIGH FEVER. HE'S GONE TO BED AND ASKED FOR HIS GRAVE TO BE DUG!!!
THE SICKNESS GOT WORSE, AND SIX DAYS LATER...
TAKE ME TO THE CHAPEL TO RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION...
AND HELD UP BY TWO BROTHERS HE RECEIVED COMMUNION.
IT WAS MARCH 21, 547,* HOLY THURSDAY...
THEN, RAISING HIS ARMS TO HEAVEN IN A LAST PRAYER, BENEDICT GAVE HIS SOUL TO GOD.
HE WAS LAID TO REST, AS HE HAD WISHED, NEXT TO HIS SISTER SCHOLASTICA.
39

*THE YEAR IS UNCERTAIN; IT MAY HAVE BEEN 548.

And Pope Gregory, concluding his biography...
Even the grave would not separate these two beings who had always been united in God.
And at that time I was only seven years old, my dear Peter.
Shouldn't we still mention the vision that two of his disciples had: that shining light coming from his room and rising up to heaven,* and that voice which said that Benedict had just arrived there?
I would add the miracles and cures that happened at the tomb. Even those in the Subiaco cave where he lived as a young man...
In those years, 593-594, when Pope Gregory was writing the biography of Benedict, the monks of Monte Cassino were fleeing from the Lombard hordes and taking refuge in Rome. In this way some of them became co-workers of the Pope...
Justinian's death in 565 had weakened the empire. Taking advantage of this situation, new tribes coming from south of the Danube, the Lombards, progressively invaded the peninsula around 568.
Despite heroic resistance by the Byzantines, the enemy's progress was irreversible. It went on until the end of the century.
At this time, the Monte Cassino Monastery was sacked in 589 and the monks fled to Rome.
Many dioceses also disappeared...
40

*A vision that showed Benedict's holiness as he was welcomed by God.

THE SIEGE OF ROME ENDED AFTER TWO YEARS. POPE GREGORY, THE DIPLOMAT, SIGNED A RENEWABLE TRUCE WITH THE LOMBARD KING AGILULPH. A DIVIDED ITALY DEVELOPED AROUND THREE POINTS: THE LOMBARD KINGDOM OF THE NORTH; THE SOUTH STILL UNDER BYZANTINE DOMINATION; AND, IN THE MIDDLE, THE POPE'S TERRITORY CLOSE TO ROME...

AFTER WRITING HIS "LIFE OF ST BENEDICT" POPE GREGORY WORKED ON THE REFORM OF GREGORIAN CHANT AND TRIED TO GET THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT KNOWN IN ALL THE ROMAN MONASTERIES...

HE ALSO PROMOTED THE GREAT ADVENTURE OF MONASTIC MISSIONS IN A EUROPE THAT WAS STILL THREE QUARTERS PAGAN...

AT THE RISK OF THEIR LIFE, MONKS GO AND SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS, AND THEY ALSO EDUCATE AND BUILD. MONASTERIES WILL STAY FOR CENTURIES THE MAJOR CENTERS OF INTELLECTUAL, CULTURAL AND ARTISITIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE WEST.

THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT GRADUALLY SPREAD. IT WAS SOMETIMES LINKED WITH THE RULE OF THE IRISH ABBOT COLUMBAN...

ST COLUMBAN (540-615)

WE HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL 817 AND THE COUNCIL OF AIX-LA-CHAPELLE FOR CONSTANTINE'S SON, EMPEROR LOUIS THE FAIR AND HIS RELIGIOUS ADVISOR, THE MONK BENEDICT OF ANIANE, TO DECREE THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT AS THE ONLY NORMATIVE RULE OF MONASTIC LIFE IN THE WEST...

AS FOR THE ABANDONED MONTE CASSINO, IT WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A HEAP OF RUINS OVERGROWN WITH VEGETATION. MORE THAN 100 YEARS BEFORE THE 817 DECREE, IN 672, A GROUP OF FRENCH MONKS FROM FLEURY-SUR-LOIRE HAD GONE THERE TO FIND THE TOMB OF BENEDICT AND SCHOLASTICA.

THAT STONE! IT'S HERE!

YES, THE GRAVE MUST BE HERE!

THE REMAINS OF BENEDICT WERE THEN TRANSFERRED TO FLEURY, WHICH WOULD BE NAMED SAINT-BENOÎT-SUR LOIRE. A HUGE BENEDICTINE BASILICA WAS BUILT...

THE RELICS WERE LATER GIVEN BACK TO MONTE CASSINO IN THE TIME OF POPE ZACHARY (741-752). BENEDICT'S TOMB WAS DISCOVERED DURING THE REBUILDING AFTER 1945.

IT IS STILL A SORE SUBJECT BETWEEN ITALIAN AND FRENCH BENEDICTINES...

41

As for Scholastica, she rested at first in Le Mans, then later in the church at Juvigny-les-Dames,* in the Verdun Diocese.

After being abandoned for years, the Monte Cassino Monastery was finally rebuilt on the initiative of Pope Gregory II around 717... But Saracen pirates looted it again in 882.

Then in 1030 it was the Normans' turn as they began to invade southern Italy...

In 1849, during a violent earthquake that struck the whole peninsula and damaged many ancient and medieval monuments, the monastery was practically destroyed.

Lord, it's the end of the world!

Rebuilt on a larger scale, thanks to people's tireless perseverance, it continued to be one of Italy's and medieval Europe's cultural centres...

The Benedictines courageously rebuilt it each time...

Monte Cassino around 1077...

In the Middle Ages monastic orders multiplied, and most of them adopted the Rule of St Benedict, as in the 10th century the Cluny Order, and in the 11th century the Cistercian Order. Thanks to the dynamism of the Abbot of Clairvaux, Europe was covered with Cistercian churches and monasteries...

St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1158)

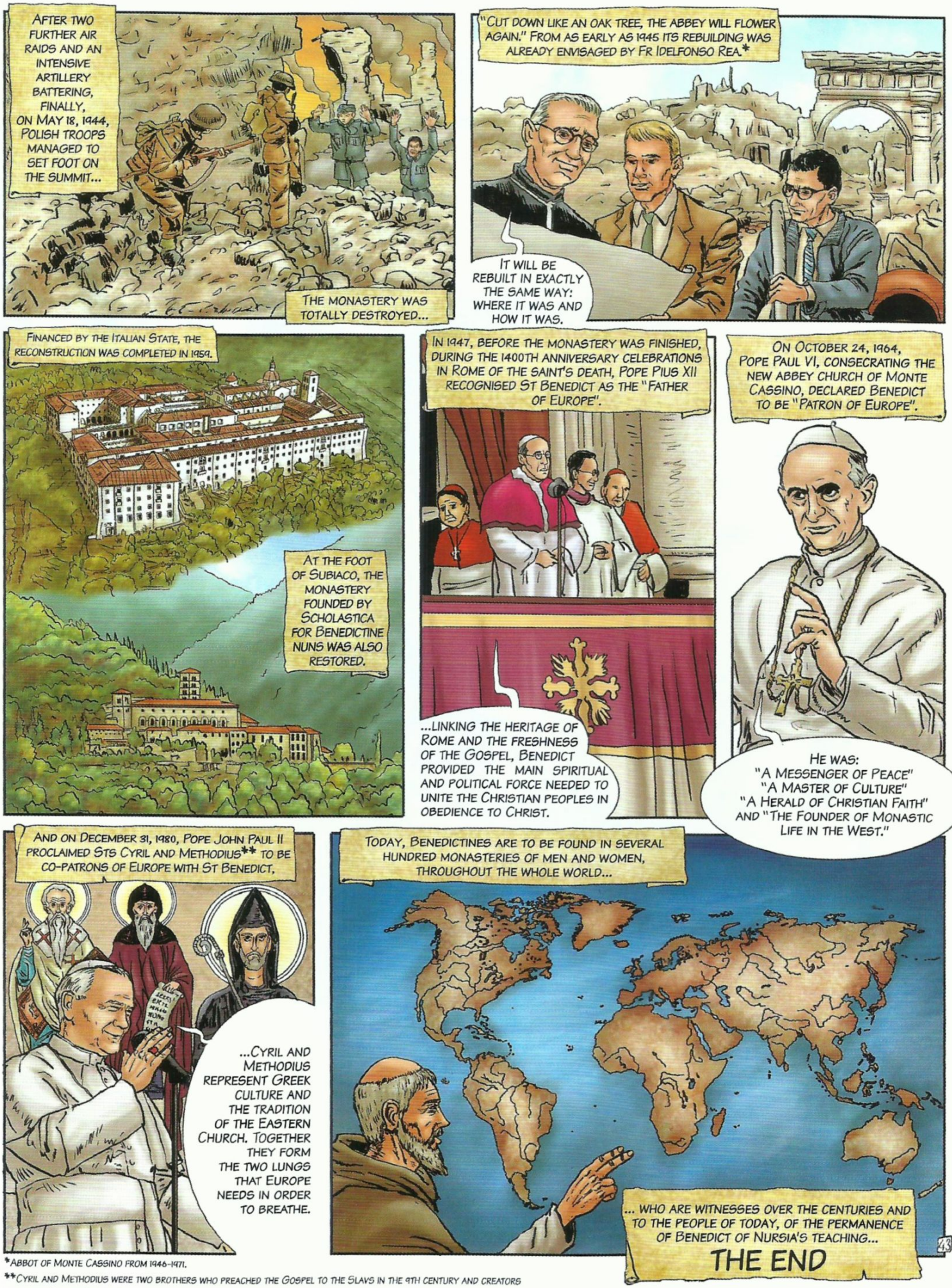
At the Lateran Council of 1215, the Rule of St Benedict became the exclusive standard for monastic life in the West.

Cross of St Benedict.

As for Monte Cassino,** it would find itself at the centre of one of the most terrible battles of the Second World War.

It was in a strategic position occupied by the Germans, who wanted to bar the Allies' route to Rome. From February 15 to 17, 1944, 250 American bombers dropped 576 tons of bombs.

*Today it is known as Juvigny-sur-Loison. **Declared a National Monument in 1866.


After two further air raids and an intensive artillery battering, finally, on May 18, 1944, Polish troops managed to set foot on the summit...
The monastery was totally destroyed...
"Cut down like an oak tree, the abbey will flower again." From as early as 1945 its rebuilding was already envisaged by Fr Idelfonso Rea.*
It will be rebuilt in exactly the same way: where it was and how it was.
Financed by the Italian State, the reconstruction was completed in 1959.
At the foot of Subiaco, the monastery founded by Scholastica for Benedictine nuns was also restored.
In 1947, before the monastery was finished, during the 1400th anniversary celebrations in Rome of the saint's death, Pope Pius XII recognised St Benedict as the "Father of Europe".
...linking the heritage of Rome and the freshness of the Gospel, Benedict provided the main spiritual and political force needed to unite the Christian peoples in obedience to Christ.
On October 24, 1964, Pope Paul VI, consecrating the new abbey church of Monte Cassino, declared Benedict to be "Patron of Europe".
He was: "A Messenger of Peace" "A Master of Culture" "A Herald of Christian Faith" and "The Founder of Monastic Life in the West."
And on December 31, 1980, Pope John Paul II proclaimed Sts Cyril and Methodius** to be co-patrons of Europe with St Benedict,
...Cyril and Methodius represent Greek culture and the tradition of the Eastern Church. Together they form the two lungs that Europe needs in order to breathe.
Today, Benedictines are to be found in several hundred monasteries of men and women, throughout the whole world...
... who are witnesses over the centuries and to the people of today, of the permanence of Benedict of Nursia's teaching...
THE END

*Abbot of Monte Cassino from 1946-1971.

**Cyril and Methodius were two brothers who preached the Gospel to the Slavs in the 9th century and creators of the Cyrillic Alphabet.

S BE
NEDICTVS.

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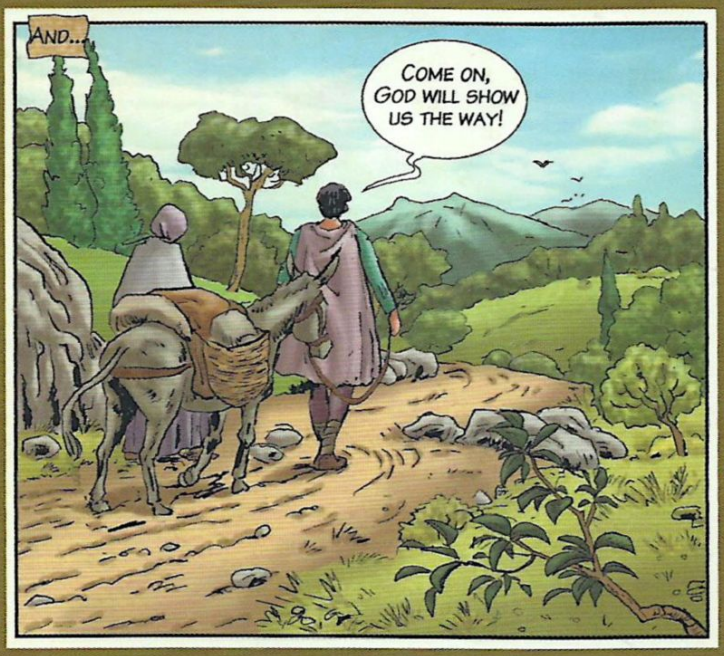

Saint Benedict (480-547)

St Benedict, whom monks in the West consider their patron, was born in Nursia in Umbria, Italy, to a comfortable family that sent him to study in Rome. But the young man preferred solitude. Events would see him later become superior of a community of monks at Monte Cassino. For them he wrote a balanced Rule which took into account his own human and spiritual experience.

His biography, recounted in this booklet, is largely inspired by the account of Benedict's life written by Pope St Gregory. The many miracles which the author uses to enhance the life of his hero are perhaps not all historical. Gregory wanted to produce not so much a work of "biography" (in the modern sense) as the life of a saint intended to encourage Christians in Rome in troubled times and to show them that God never abandons his children, even in the darkest periods of history.

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